



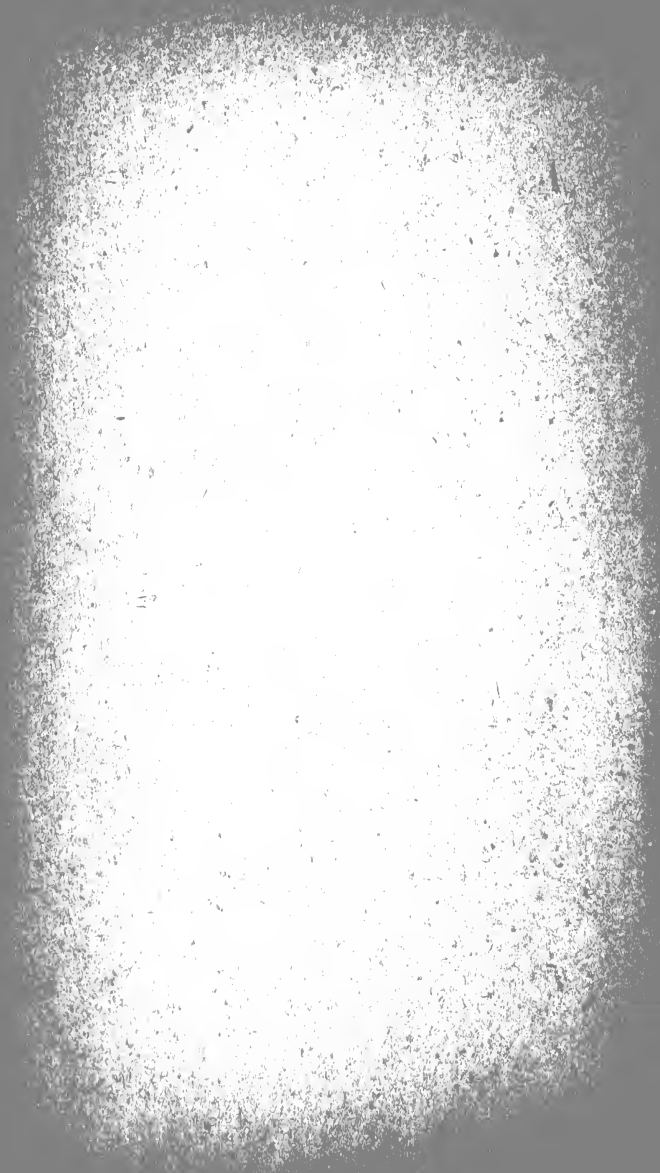
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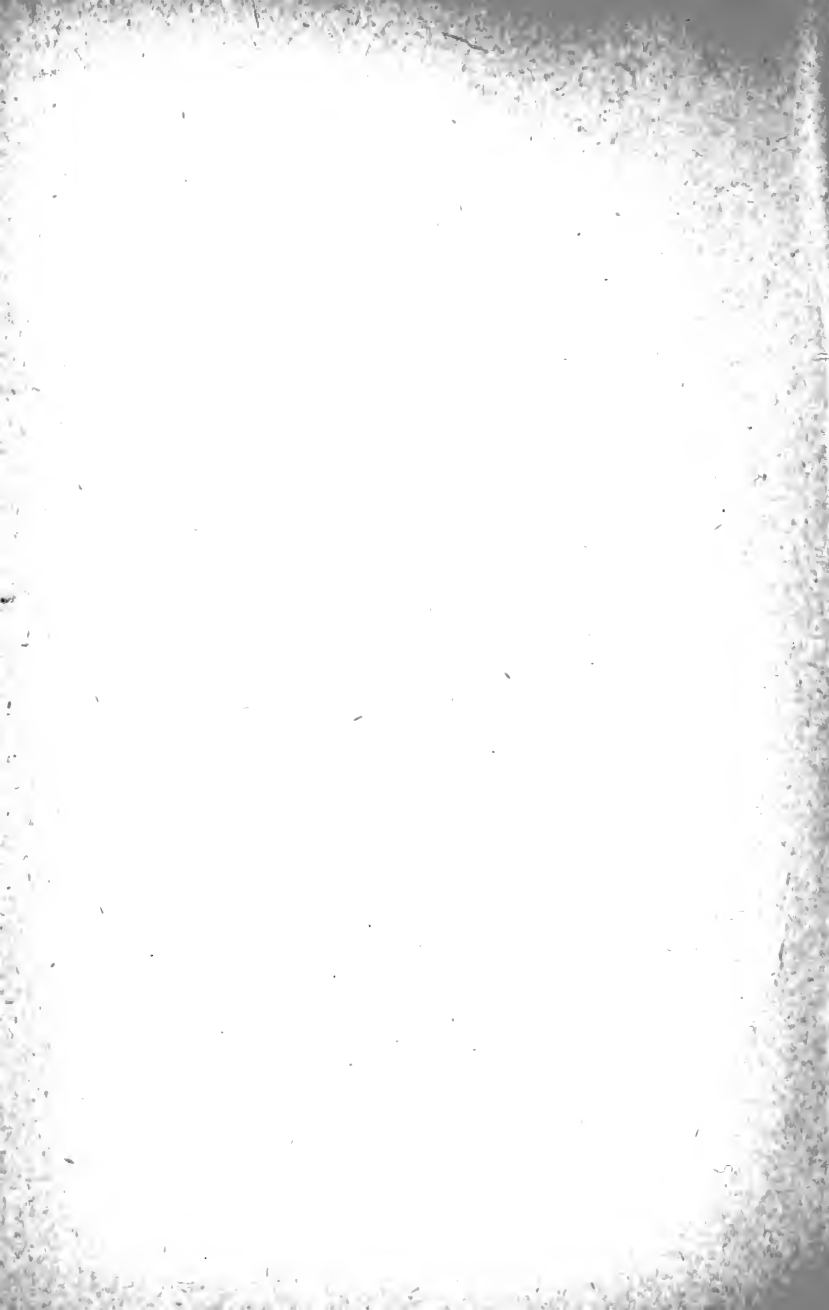
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MONA'S CHOICE.

VOL. II.

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MONA'S CHOICE.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF

'THE WOOING O'T,' 'HER DEAREST FOE,'
'THE ADMIRAL'S WARD,' 'AT BAY,' 'BY WOMAN'S WIT,'
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MONA'S CHOICE.



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CHAPTER I.

A HIGHLAND LADDIE.

UNCLE SANDY lost no time in shifting his quarters.

Early in the forenoon of the day on which his week in the Camden Town lodgings ended, he appeared at Westbourne Villas with all his effects.

It was a curious collection—a battered leather portmanteau, a couple of cushions strapped on top of it; a tin box, bursting with the number of medicine bottles,

lotions, and embrocations crammed into it; a large, untidy parcel of books, tied with many pieces of twine knotted together; and one inexplicable item—a large, wide-mouthed, brown earthen jar, a square of canvas fastened carefully over the orifice. These—a spare umbrella and two walking-sticks of different thickness—were carefully transferred to his apartments.

Mona and madame had endeavoured to make them look neat and cheerful, had contributed some flowers and a growing fern to the decoration of the sitting-room, and flattered themselves that Mr Craig would be charmed with the attention.

‘Ah!’ he groaned—a guttural ‘ah’—dropping into a chair as soon as he had mounted to his rooms. ‘It’s an awfu’ way up! I was better on the ground floor in yon house.’

‘Oh, I hope you won’t regret the change!’ said Madame Debrisay politely. ‘You will not want to go up or down stairs much; and you see the folding-doors to your *chambre a coucher* make it nice and airy.’

‘To my what?’ asked Uncle Sandy.
‘I dinna understand foreign tongues.’

‘Your bedroom. You see, my dear sir, I am half French, and the language I have been so long accustomed to slips out now and then.’

Uncle Sandy gave an inarticulate grunt in reply to this explanation, and then, looking round and sniffing vigorously, he exclaimed,—

‘What’s that I smell so strong?’

‘Perhaps these flowers,’ returned Mona, who came in as he spoke, carrying his sticks and umbrella.

‘Ay, no doubt. Just take them away, will ye? They are varra unwholesome!’

‘Not in your sitting-room, uncle, surely?’ said Mona, smiling at the idea of the useless trouble she had taken.

‘I am no so sure; and you must remember I’m frail—varra frail; it’s my breathing and my back, and my puir, puir limbs’—in accents of the tenderest self-pity—‘that just wears and distresses me from morn till night.’

‘It is *very* trying!’ said Madame Debrisay sympathetically.

Mona unstrapped the cushions, and placed one behind him.

‘Thank ye, thank ye, dearie!’ in a more amiable tone.

‘Would you like any refreshment?’ asked Madame Debrisay.

‘Weel, I might take a biscuit and a glass of apollonaris water.’

‘Water, alone, my dear sir? Will you not put something in to qualify it?’

‘I am a temperance man, you see; but the doctors say I ought to take a drap whisky for my stomach’s sake.’

‘I am so sorry! but we have not such a thing in the house! I will send Jane for some.’

‘London whisky!’ cried Uncle Sandy, very audibly; adding, with pious earnestness, ‘God forbid!’ Then rising, he clutched Mona’s arm with one hand and his stick with the other. ‘I have a drappie in my portmantle, and I’ll just get it!’

‘Can I get it for you, uncle?’

‘Naw!’ very decidedly. ‘I never give my keys to anyone!’

With many groans he bent his knees, leaning heavily on Mona—for the port-

manteau had been placed on the floor—and managed to unlock it. Mona had stepped back as soon as he let her go, lest he should think her inquisitive; but the heavy lid was too much for him.

‘Why don’t ye give me a han’?’ he asked querulously.

Mona came to his assistance, and the exceedingly mixed contents of the port-manteau were displayed to view.

Uncle Sandy pitched out trousers and waistcoats and socks recklessly till he reached the layer where the whisky-bottle was embedded; he handed it to his niece, and, having thrust his garments in again, locked the receptacle; and, rising with the help of madame and Mona, tumbled into his chair again, with many exclamations of pain. The desired refreshment was procured, and then Mona proposed that he should have the newspaper, and rest till dinner.

‘Ay!’ said Uncle Sandy, ‘that’ll do fine. I am just awfu’ weary. Are ye going to give me a bite the day, as there is nothing preparat?’

‘Certainly!’ said Mona.

‘It was our intention to beg the pleasure of your company,’ said Madame Debrisay.

‘Then I’ll come. It’s a pity I have to gang doon stairs; but it canna’ be helpit!’

‘My dear Deb,’ said Mona, sitting down again to some work which the arrival had interrupted, ‘I am afraid Uncle Sandy will be something like Sinbad’s Old Man of the Sea. You have undertaken a rather heavy task; it seems to me that he expects us to do everything for, and be everything to, him.’

‘Well, well, Mona; you would not be cold and heartless to your poor father’s only surviving brother? The poor old gentleman is worn out with fatigue and suffering; he will be more himself and more reasonable to-morrow. You would not refuse to soothe the declining years of a poor, lonely man?’

‘No, I will gladly help him in any way I can; but he may be rather a worry. However, he seems something of a character, and may develop attractive qualities. I am quite sure my father was never like him! Could you fancy

a high-born, handsome girl running away with Uncle Sandy at any period of his life ?’

Madame Debrisay laughed heartily.

‘Ah ! Mona, you are a quare girl !’

When madame was thoroughly off her guard and speaking English, her native accent made itself heard occasionally. In French, she was fluent, with a pure Parisian pronunciation, which was valuable to her in her professional capacity.

From the date of Uncle Sandy’s settlement the partners felt that the freedom of their holiday was over. He unhesitatingly claimed constant help and attention. Moreover, he cavilled at the price paid for everything they bought ; and many were the commissions he gave both.

Still Madame Debrisay clung to the idea that he was a millionaire, though she carefully kept her impression to herself.

‘It is only the rich who are so saving,’ she said to Mrs Puddiford, with whom she often condescended to talk. ‘He always has money enough for whatever he wants.’

‘I don’t think he is so bad as he seems, ma’am,’ returned the landlady. ‘He comes

downstairs a good bit faster when nobody is looking.'

'Oh! he is far from strong, I assure you. Indeed, I don't think he is long for this world.'

'Don't you, now, ma'am! Well, I don't know, I am sure.'

From the beginning, Uncle Sandy, on finding that madame had the *Times* every morning for an hour, proposed to share the subscription and the perusal with her.

'You'll no care to read much of it,' he said, 'and it will lighten the expense to you. Then I get the *Scotsman*, and you are welcome to that when I have done with it.'

'Oh! my dear Mr Craig! I read my *Times* right through in holiday time. When I am off early to my work, I get it in the evening. Now I would advise you to buy the paper half-price, and read it quietly in the evening. You might sell the papers after for waste, you know.'

Uncle Sandy thought this 'verra wise-like.' He then discovered that his eyes were uncommon weak of late, and he asked either Mona or Madame Debrisay

to read to him, which they rarely refused to do. Next he took it into his head that he would like to 'do' London under Mona's guidance. This was rather a toilsome undertaking, for it was just 'sinfu' waste' in his mind to hire a cab; and getting him in and out of omnibuses was no slight undertaking, to say nothing of a running fire of disputes with conductors, and laborious studying of the fares painted inside, while the vehicle 'stopped the way' to a crowd of carts, hansoms, and vans.

Then Uncle Sandy, though confessing loudly his consciousness or inferiority, owing to his few opportunities or 'privileeges,' thought himself a remarkably intellectual man. He had no doubt heightened his natural obstinacy by self-education, and he had a tenacious memory. These qualities rendered him exceedingly contradictory. He would even question the dates given by the clerical verger who lectured on the chapels in Westminster Abbey, and keep a whole party waiting, impervious to the disgust of his learned interlocutor. He did not grow angry or excited; he simply slowly asserted his own views, without the

slightest regard to the mental condition of his opponent—exciting in irritable people a wild desire to seize him by the throat, and give him a silencing squeeze.

With all his peculiarities, there was a certain originality in Uncle Sandy which attracted Mona. Although his ideas of expenditure were narrow, he was rigid in paying whatever he believed he ought to pay. Nor was he conscious of exacting more than he gave. Still, his recognition of the rights of others was by no means so clear as his perception of his own. But what attracted his niece most was his strong liking for herself.

Though undemonstrative, his small pale, querulous face always brightened when she came near him; and occasionally the appellation 'my dearie' came to his lips unconsciously. He even remarked, with reluctant admiration, that she read verra clear and distinct for a Southron lassie. 'No but ye show your Scotch blood,' he would often add, 'both by your working independent for your living, and by your bonnie reed heid.'

The fact of her having red hair, as he

considered it, seemed to be one of Mona's strongest claims upon his affection. It appeared to be a kind of proof positive that she belonged to him.

Curiously enough, Madame Debrisay never quite succeeded in winning his confidence, though attentive and considerate beyond what he could expect. He spoke to her less gently, and contradicted her more flatly than he did Mona. As his instincts where self was concerned were preternaturally keen, perhaps he felt that her kindness was less disinterested than Mona's, and could not picture to himself the devotion which could make one woman interested for another's sake.

His greatest enjoyment was to listen to Mona reading the papers to him—next to her playing of Scotch airs. He would listen to no other music save a few hymns or psalms. He was very particular about attending public worship, and insisted occasionally on Mona accompanying him, that she might hear 'soond doctrine,' which was a great punishment, for he was exceedingly religious, in a dogmatic and disagreeable fashion. Madame Debrisay had

skilfully and gracefully glided out of a proposal on his part to share their midday dinner, paying his proportion.

‘It would be very nice, my dear Mr Craig,’ she said; ‘but you see you might regret beginning what you could not continue; for when families return to town, and we begin to be busy, we often do not dine at all, and always irregularly. That would never suit your poor digestion.’

‘That’s well thought,’ said Uncle Sandy gravely. ‘My food must be punctual, or I canna live.’

‘It is indeed of the last importance.’

‘I am surprised,’ he resumed, ‘to find how far Londoners are behind us in the matter of cooking. I brought a small bag of oatmeal, thinking I could get “parritch” to my breakfast, and I went to the cost of an earthen pan to pit it in; but eh, sirs! what a fearsome-like mess the landlady in yon house made of it! I’ve not had the courage to ask for it mair.’

‘Porridge!’ cried Madame Debrisay joyously. ‘My dear Mr Craig, if I had had the faintest idea what the contents of that crock were, you should have had

your porridge every day. I am to the manner born. We have the same thing by another name in my country. May I see the oatmeal, if it is in good condition ?'

'Ay, that you may. It's in yon corner. If ye can give me my parritch every morn to my breakfast, I'll be anither mon. I have wanted it sore.'

Madame scarcely waited the permission before she pounced upon the jar which had often puzzled her, and examined it carefully.

'It seems all right,' she said triumphantly. 'Let me take it away and keep it for you.'

'Ay, so you may, only be sparing ; for when that is gone, it will be troublesome and "expenseeve" to get mair frae Scotland.'

'I assure you, Mr Craig, you can get every article you require better in London than anywhere else.'

'But not oatmeal, I'm thinking.'

'Yes, even oatmeal ; and I will prove it to you.'

'Aweel, you're a clever woman ; but I doubt if ye can manage that.'

Madame bore away the 'crock' in

triumph, and informed Mona she had found a new way to the old man's heart.

Nevertheless, he did not swallow Madame Debrisay with the porridge made by her fair hands.

He appreciated it, however, and thanked her with more gratitude than he usually evinced.

Naturally the holiday enjoyments of the two friends were considerably curtailed by the presence of Uncle Sandy. Still they contrived to spend two or three tranquilly pleasant days at Hampton Court, Richmond, and other suburban places of resort, though Uncle Sandy grumbled a good deal at being left alone.

The six weeks of vacation passed swiftly withal.

The autumn was exceptionally fine after a wet summer, and pupils prolonged their absence from town. October was half over, and Madame Debrisay was again in harness. Mona, too, had resumed work, and her uncle was divided between gratification at her industry and annoyance at her frequent absence. He was deeply interested in the details of her occupation, and

she evidently rose in his estimation when he heard of the remuneration she received, which seemed to him very high. Money paid was in his estimation the hall-mark of merit.

Through all this time Mona thought often and sadly of the paragraph which described Leslie Waring's supposed losses. She did not exactly believe that disappointed love had driven him to seek distraction in play ; but had he not wasted his affection on herself, he might have found some one to share his home and his love, and care for another might have saved him.

It had been a cruel disappointment when one day, returning with madame from a trip to Greenwich, she found Lady Finistoun's card. On the back was scribbled,—
' So sorry to miss you. Only arrived yesterday, and go north to-morrow. Will write from—'

Had she seen her cousin. She might have heard something of Waring without asking directly. And how delightful it would have been to see Evelyn once more.

The days had shortened considerably, and the nights had grown sharp and chill.

Mr Craig was painfully early both in rising and retiring. He was rarely out of bed at nine in winter or ten in summer ; and being unable to get out of doors as much as in the fine early autumn days, was rather more exacting and troublesome. Mona found reading aloud more of a tax after teaching than it had seemed in her holiday time, but she rarely disappointed her uncle ; when too tired Madame Debrisay supplied her place.

But he never approved the change.

‘ I don’t know how it is, but for all I try, I don’t think your uncle loves a bone in my skin. Never mind, so long as he is good to you, and remembers you, I am content.

‘ He ought to be very grateful to you, Deb, for all you have done for him.’

‘ Ah, my dear ! very few men have any gratitude to bestow.’

These words were exchanged as Mona was about to ascend to her uncle’s sitting-room, where she found him sitting over the fire, his feet on a hassock placed inside the fender.

‘ Come your ways,’ he cried. ‘ The sight of you is good for sair een now-a-days !

Have ye had your bite? Ay? Then we'll have a good spell o' the papers before bedtime. But, first, there's a bit note I want to write to a laddie I have neglected in a way—my sister's son, Kenneth Macalister. He is in an office in the City—a big place—doin' well, I believe.'

'A nephew of yours?'

'Ay, a nephew' (he pronounced it 'nay-few'). 'He used to come and see me there in Camden Town. But he and Jamie Black—the lad I shared the lodging with—used to make a noise, and argue, and go on wi' fules' talk, till I said I would not put up wi' it. And Kenneth—he had a Hie-landman's temper—he got offended. Noo, he has come back from his holiday, and is clothed (I daur say he left off the breeks when he went home) and in his right mind. So he writes for leave to come and see me. He is a gude laddie, in a way—not varra weel informed; but everyone hasn't had opportunities, nor have they striven to edicate themselves as *I* have, though my disadvantages have been great. Noo, my hand is varra shaky the night, so you write for me, my dearie. Tell him to come early

to kirk here bye, neext Sawbath, and come back with me to a bit dinner. Madame will let us dine with you—have a joint, or something a hungry laddie can cut from and come again. She'll tell me my share. Give him a bottle of beer. We'll say nawthing about the drap whisky—it's no that good for a young mon, and I haven't much left.'

'Very well, uncle. How shall I begin? I never met this young man, who is, I suppose, my cousin?'

'Not all out. My mither was twice married, and Kenneth's mither was my half-sister; still, he is a near kinsman.'

'I will write as if from you. Tell me what to say, and you can sign the letter.'

'Varra weel.'

A very few lines sufficed; a few directions as to trains were added, and the note was ready for signature.

'I want you to be kind and friendly to the laddie. You and he are all that's left of my people,' said Uncle Sandy meditatively; 'and he is no that bad—only self-opinionated. Now there is nothing worse than being self-opinionated; it's just a barrier against the incoming of knowledge.'

‘No doubt,’ said Mona, with an irrepressible smile.

She took up the paper and read perseveringly, until her uncle, consulting his watch, decided it was time to go to bed.

The following Sunday was dull and grey, but dry.

Mr Craig sometimes hobbled to ‘kirk’ alone, when Mona struck and insisted on attending her own place of worship, much to his annoyance.

On the present occasion she started early, to reach a distant church, thinking that dinner-time and the whole afternoon would be a sufficient sacrifice to her newly-found cousin.

She was a little late in returning, and went at once to lay aside her out-door garments. While doing so, the sound of voices in the next room—the polite, guarded tones of Madame Debrisay, told her that she was receiving company.

Dinner was being placed on the table when she entered. Uncle Sandy had already taken his place, and Madame Debrisay was in the act of gracefully indicat-

ing his seat to a young man—a young man whose appearance startled Mona.

Hearing Uncle Sandy always speak of his 'nayfew' as a 'laddie,' she unconsciously formed a picture of an undersized, shy lad, slight and insignificant, with the family 'reed heid'—something in style between a shopboy and an errand-boy. She actually beheld a very tall, well-built figure, surmounted by an exceedingly black head, the hair short and thick; heavy dark eyebrows, and large, dark, deepset, flashing eyes; an aquiline nose; high cheek bones; a pathetic mouth, with somewhat down-curved corners, unmasked by moustaches, and a deep red-brown complexion.

'This is Kenneth Macalister — your cousin Kenneth,' quoth Mr Craig as, he tucked a napkin under his chin.

Mona bowed and smiled, but Macalister took a large stride forward, holding out a big, bony, brown hand, and reddening as he exclaimed,—

'I am very'—he said 'ferry'—'glad to make your acquaintance.'

There was a certain dignity in his carriage, but Mona saw that he was shy,

though probably his pride was strong to aid him in concealing it. She put her hand into his, saying pleasantly,—

‘It seems wonderful to me to dine with an uncle and a cousin. I have always seemed denuded of near relatives.’

‘Ay, but you have plenty!’ said Macalister, taking his seat. ‘I have twenty-seven first-cousins on my father’s side, and fourteen on my mother’s. I have more than double that in second-cousins, but having been much from home, I cannot count all my far-away kin.’

He spoke with the soft, slow Highland accent, which must be imagined.

‘Why, that is an awful army of relatives. Life would be too short to know them all.’

‘We were once a powerful tribe,’ he returned solemnly.

‘Hoot man! eat your dinner and dinna fash us wi’ your auld-warld stories,’ said Uncle Sandy, as he received a tempting slice from a plump leg of Welsh mutton.

‘I did not mean to weary you!’ exclaimed Macalister, with a quick contraction of the brows; and silence reigned till the first pangs of hunger were appeased.

‘What’ll ye tak’?’ asked Mr Craig presently: ‘beer or wine?’

‘Neither, sir. I drink only water and a drop of whisky sometimes. Wine is rather indifferent in London’—this loftily.

The young Highlander would have let any amount of foxes gnaw his vitals before he would confess that he was almost a total abstainer, from motives of economy.

‘It’s no an indifferent price, then,’ grumbled Uncle Sandy.

‘We find a very tolerable light claret at fifteen shillings a dozen,’ remarked Madame Debrisay. ‘I fancy it might suit you, Mr Craig, for a little change.’

‘Ay, but I dinna want a change. Good cold water is the best of all, only I am forced to qualify it now and again wi’ a drap o’ whisky, which I tak medicinally, you understand.’

‘Have you been long in London?’ asked Mona.

‘Going on three years; before that, I was in a Glasgow house.’

‘And you like London better than Glasgow?’

‘I hated both! but I am getting used to

London : there is much to be done and learned here.'

'It is a wonderful place. Do you often go to the theatre?'

'Scarce ever. I am tired after the day's work ; and in summer I would rather take a row on the river.'

'The young are aye carried awa wi' an inordinate love of amusement, an—an' excitement, in these latter days.'

'“Man cannot live by bread alone,”' said Macalister gravely. 'Man wants food for imagination and wonder, and—and self improvement.'

'It ill becomes the son of a God-fearin' minister to be quoting Scripture for his ain weak purposes,' observed Uncle Sandy reprovingly. 'I will na' hear it, and it maks me in dread for your immortal soul when I do.'

'Well, Uncle Sandy,' cried Mona, coming to the rescue, 'you must admit that all work and no play makes Jack a very dull boy.'

'I am no so sure o' that ; *I* worked hard enough, and *I* never was dull.'

'And pray, Mr Macalister, how is trade

at present ?' asked Madame Debrisay comprehensively, with a view to changing the subject.

This produced a lengthy and rambling reply, after which Uncle Sandy avowed his intention of closing his eyes for quarter of an hour. He therefore reascended with his '*nayphew's*' help to his room. Madame Debrisay excused herself, because she had promised to visit some professional friends, so Mona was left alone with her newly-discovered cousin.

When he returned, after conveying Mr Craig upstairs, he sat down by the table. resting his elbow on it, and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked curiously at Mona, who was reading a French book of travels, which she laid down politely on his reappearing.

'My uncle seems a good deal tired.'

She did not know what in the world to talk about to this tall, semi-civilised young man.

'He is that ! but he is an aged person : he has nearly reached the years allotted to man.'

'I suppose so.'

A pause.

‘When my uncle wrote to me that he had found his brother’s daughter, I did not think I should find you such a grand young lady. You don’t seem to belong to us, though the Macalisters are an old stock.’

‘You see I was always brought up in London and on the Continent; that makes me seem different. I am not grand.’

‘It is more than that,’ he said reflectively, ‘more than that. Yet you are like a young lady I used to go to school with when I was a wee lad. I saw her again this autumn when I was back in Glenhoulaghan; and she is like you—*fery* like—only you are taller and statelier.’

‘And has she a “bonnie reed heid,” as my uncle says I have?’

‘Your locks are more gold than red,’ said the young Highlander, with an admiring smile; ‘but Mary’s are browner, and she seems younger.’

‘And I suppose you enjoy getting away to the mountains and lochs of your native place?’

‘Eh ! it’s another life. I had not been back for two years, and I had no mother to welcome me this time.’

He stopped abruptly.

‘That made a sad difference,’ said Mona softly.

He did not speak immediately, and when he did, it was to ask in an altered tone,—

‘Were you ever in the Highlands?’

‘Never.’

‘There is nothing like them anywhere ! To be sure, I haven’t seen much else, but there *can* be nothing finer. Whether it’s the grey dawn flushing redder and redder over the mountain tops, or the soft evening fading from crimson and purple, gold and lilac, to the pale blue mist and silvery moonlight ; and the air so fresh and free ; the springy heather, that makes your step light ; the grand exulting sense of climbing higher and higher. I feel a man among my native hills—I’m just a dull machine in this big breathless town.’

‘Certainly not a dull one. You are a poet, Mr Macalister.’

‘Me ? Well, no ; I never tried writing

verses ; but I am a good craig's-man, and no a bad shot ; as to feeshin, few can touch me. Did you ever land a saumon ?'

'No ! I have only seen it boiled on a dish.'

'Well !' enthusiastically, 'it's just graund ! I wish I could take you right away and show you all over the big mountains, the glens, and the straths ; and row you out on the quiet loch in the hush of the evening.'

'I wish you could ! I should enjoy such a ramble immensely.'

'Weel,' in a lowered and mysterious tone, 'my uncle maybe will ask you to stay at Craigdarroch. He has a lovely place there.'

Here a violent peal of Mr Craig's bell summoned them both to their attendance on that honoured relative.

.
'Do you know, Deb, I am quite interested in that young Highlander ; there is something uncommon about him — he is an original.'

'I don't know, and I don't much care, about his originality, but I do care that he

shouldn't come between you and your uncle's natural affection. My impression is that he is a selfish legacy hunter.'

'In short, he is what you wish me to be. Oh, Deb, Deb!'





CHAPTER II.

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST.

AFTER this first visit Kenneth Macalister came frequently on Sundays, and sometimes of a week-day evening. He would appear between eight and nine o'clock, having walked straight from the city after business—just to stretch his limbs, he said, after sitting cramped at a desk all day long.

Mr Craig, though by no means cordial in his welcome, on the whole encouraged him to come, and seemed pleased that Mona lent him books from her scanty store, or played to him, which gave him great delight. Indeed she grew quite fond of the queer, half-developed, irritable, im-

pressionable young man, who found such evident pleasure in her society.

Madame Debrisay, too — though distrusting his influence on Uncle Sandy — liked him in spite of herself. Homely and even uncouth as he was, he was free from the smallest tinge of vulgarity, and by nature was a true chivalrous gentleman. He had not much of the business faculty, yet plodded on steadily at his distasteful work. It seemed to Mona that he ought to have been a soldier, a herdsman, or an agriculturist, and that ungenial occupation, or some early trouble, had given a tinge of melancholy to his mind.

Meantime, her pupils increased, and she began to realise the wondrous healing powers of time and work,—that to live for pleasure was but a poor and partial existence. Uncle Sandy, however, missed her frequent companionship greatly, and did not hesitate to complain of her frequent absence.

‘Sure, you can’t leave off earning your bread to dance attendance on him,’ said Madame Debrisay, whose tender consideration for Mr Craig had altered a good

deal since his nephew appeared upon the scene. 'He is really growing a cantankerous old soul. One would think the world was made for his use. You must just make him understand that you have your living to get, and if he wants you to act as his daughter, he should behave as a father.'

'Very well, Deb. I will tell him so.'

'But you need not quarrel with him, though. I think he really is fond of you.'

'So do I, and rather dependant on me, which disposes me to give in a good deal to him. Do you know, he is a clever old man in some ways. He says very bright things occasionally, and has read a great deal; yet how ignorant he is in some directions.'

'Ah! my dear, that's because he has had only books to instruct him. It's a one-sided sort of knowledge that is not corrected by contact with your fellow-creatures.'

'His politics are very funny. He is a tremendous Radical as affects social matters and those above him in rank; but just tremendously Conservative as regards the

rights of property and those who are in a humbler position.'

'Of course he is. He is not the sort of man to see both sides of a question. I wish there was someone to keep him company, and go out with him, when we are away. And he gets up so cruel early, the days are twice as long as they need be, for a creature that has nothing to do. Could you start him to write anything?'

'I am afraid not. I think his medicine and his two walks a day, with that "History of the Covenant" he has begun, will keep him fairly busy.'

'Well, I hope so. It certainly is a terrible thing to be old and alone. I sometimes wonder what will become of meself.'

'Ah! Deb, you and I must stick by each other.'

'You, my darlin'; you'll marry the prince yet.'

The winter wore on. It was severe; but Mona going constantly out kept free from cold. Kenneth had been gradually adopted by her, and was her companion on many a Sunday. Indeed, Mrs Puddiford and her servant considered him to be Miss

Craig's 'young man.' From this companionship Kenneth learned much of manners and even modes of thought—learned, too, with the rapidity of an imaginative, impressionable nature. He admired and looked up to his cousin with profound conviction. His society amused Mona, and helped to make her feel younger and more cheerful. Her own spirits were exceedingly variable. Sometimes Uncle Sandy's cutting remarks and utter want of tact would raise his nephew's wrath, and he would pour out his wounded feelings with much volubility to his cousin, who generally reasoned with, and calmed him.

'He thinks because he has a lot of money, and I have a right to expect he will remember his sister's son, that he can trample me under his feet ; but I will have him to know that the Macalisters were gentlemen when the Craigs were lowland peasants.'

'Come, Kenneth, don't insult the Craigs; they are my people, and you must not be rude.'

'You are quite different ; you are a queen—so you seem to me ; but you don't

insult a fellow ! I'll not come near Uncle Sandy till—'

'Till next Sunday,' interrupted Mona. 'What should I do without my walk ? And, Kenneth, I always want you to come with me.'

'Oh, I'll come, cousin Mona ! No fear ; you sha'n't want your walk for me ; but Sandy Craig is no gentleman, though he *is* my mother's brother—half-brother, I mean.'

Kenneth continued to speak, but his words conveyed no sense to Mona, for her eyes had been attracted by a well-known figure.

This conversation had taken place as the cousins were walking. They had come through Kensington Gardens, past the Albert Memorial, and, reaching the road, turned west, intending to return by Palace Gardens. Just in the narrowest part of the High Street, at the opposite side, two men stood talking—one short, stout, bowed-legged, and bull-necked, with amazingly tight trousers, a gaudy neck-tie, and a most horsey and repellent aspect. He had his back towards Mona

as she came up. The gentleman with whom he was in deep conversation, and who faced her, was Waring.

Waring was looking dull and sullen; his clothes carelessly put on, and an indescribable air of self-neglect pervading his appearance. Mona was so startled that she almost unconsciously put her hand through Macalister's arm, drawing near to him; and he, somewhat surprised, bent his eyes upon her with a smile. Waring, who was talking eagerly, angrily glanced towards them at that moment. Their glances met — Mona blushed vividly, Waring grew white, hesitated, raised his hand to his hat; but Mona had passed before he could lift it.

‘What was the matter?’ asked Kenneth.

‘I thought I saw a gentleman I used to know, and I—I was afraid he might come and speak to me.’

‘You should not be afraid of anyone when I am with you, cousin Mona! I would not let anyone trouble you.’

‘But there are some things you might not be able to help. However, it is no

matter. No, Kenneth — do not look back.'

'I cannot make out who it was,' said Kenneth.

'Never mind. Tell me, where did you go to church to-day, for you were not in time to go with Uncle Sandy?'

'I had letters to write, so I stayed in my lodgings : it's a comfort to write sometimes.'

'No doubt it is ; and I do not think you care for your work in the city?'

'No, I hate it ; but I must stick to it now : I am too old for anything else. I would have liked to be a farmer—a sheep farmer—or a soldier.'

'What opposing fancies—a gentle shepherd or a fighting man.'

'Shepherds have always been fighting men : David licked the Philistines!'

'True. And why, then, did you choose a career you disliked?'

'Because I was forced. I am the only son of my mother, and she was a widow. I was in haste to deliver her from the burden, and the quickest way was through Uncle Sandy. He got me a clerkship in a Glasgow house, and then I got recom-

mended on to London; but it is slow work. It will be many a long day before I can get a home of my own, unless my uncle helps me; and he is such an ill-tempered carle, I doubt if he will do much good to anyone whatever.'

'He is not unkind,' said Mona thoughtfully.

'No, he is not,' returned Kenneth, who was getting over his ill-humour; 'and he told my mother that I should be his heir *if* I would take his name! Now that's what I dinna like at all.'

'Why should you mind? You could put Macalister before the Craig, and it would not sound badly.'

'Maybe not; anyway, it will be long before I need use it.'

'Why, Kenneth, you speak as if you wanted poor Uncle Sandy to die?'

'No; I want no such thing, God knows; but a bit help just now would be worth thousands later on, when one is too old to enjoy it.'

'Why do you not tell him?'

'Tell—tell him? Why, I don't suppose he would ever see my face again if I did.'

They talked in a friendly fashion till they reached the house, when the servant informed them that Mr Craig had been asking for them, and the rest of the Sabbath was devoted to him.

Mona's sudden start and slight confusion soon passed from young Macalister's mind. But the encounter with Waring dwelt long in Mona's. She was greatly affected by seeing him look so changed for the worse. Ought she to bear the blame of this in any way? No! However grieved she might be, she could not suppose that the loss of herself had wrought such mischief. It was only his natural downward tendencies that were swaying him. And there was so much of good in his nature, it was an infinite pity that he was thus dragged down. What a horror the man was to whom he had been speaking! Poor Waring! She would have liked to have remonstrated with and saved him; but even had she the chance of doing so, she would have put herself in a false position by showing the kindly interest she felt.

.
A few days after this little adventure, and

much about the time Mrs Newburgh had died the previous year, Uncle Sandy was seized by a very sharp attack of bronchitis.

For a few days he was even in danger.

On this occasion Madame Debrisay distinguished herself. She was a capital nurse, and had had large experience.

Mona stayed with her uncle for two or three days, and did everything for him, under madame's direction. She was really touched by his suffering and his dependence. It would be dreadful to lose the last relative she had, and the only creature in the world, besides Madame Debrisay, who loved her.

Both were unceasing in their care ; but the latter was obliged to absent herself nearly all day, whereas Mona gave up her pupils that she might watch over the sufferer.

Mr Craig seemed deeply touched by the thoughtful care of his nurses—especially by Madame Debrisay's ; and the sort of mistrust with which he regarded her melted away.

The short Christmas holidays, therefore,

were anything but a cheerful period to the partners ; and though Uncle Sandy was as fractious as an invalid well could be, his occasional bursts of grateful recognition obliterated the irritation of his testiness.

To Mona, the knowledge that he was going to make Kenneth his heir brought a certain liberty of action, which set her free from any fear of being indirectly hampered by fear of her own motives.

When Mr Craig was able to get up, and stagger with Kenneth's help into his sitting-room, he was less disposed than usual to growl and find fault.

'Well, madam,' he said, 'ye may be wrang in the matter of doctrine, but you are a' right in the treatment of the sick. I'd have been a deid mon, if ye hadn't known what to do while they were seeking the doctor.'

'I am very glad to be of any use to you ; but I think, as far as constant attention went, Mona was the best of all. She left nearly all her lessons, to stay with you. However, I am glad to say she has only lost two or three.'

'Lost ! Did you say lost ?'

‘Yes, my dear sir. You see, Tuesdays and Fridays are always very busy, and she gave up three pupils for those days, not to forego her attendance on you.’

‘That was varra kind—varra. I’ll not forget it.’

He seemed lost in reflection, while Madame Debrisay murmured to herself,—

‘I wish he would remember it soon, or his memory won’t keep it.’

‘I was just thinking that Mona has been like a daughter to me,’ resumed Mr Craig. ‘I begin to think I’d be lonesome without her? Eh! Kenneth, my mon; what do you say?’

‘You would feel fery desolate without her, now you have been accustomed to her; and so might anyone. My cousin Mona is an uncommon clever, bright young leddy.’

‘Eh! ye think so, do you? Aweel, aweel. Ye pit notions in my heid.’ A pause ensued. ‘An’ hasna the meenister cam to see if I were deid or alive? and I a regular attendant for nigh nine months! He was aye sharp enough to come seeking subscriptions for his charities, and a

Christmas tree, or such like heathenish custom, but he hasna come to speak a word in season.'

'Ministers in London are very hard worked,' observed Kenneth. 'They have so much to do with the poor, they just leave the rich to take care of themselves.'

'And who says I am rich? If I have enough to pit food in my mouth, and a few decent duds on my back, have I no a soul to be saved? I daursay your priests,' to Madame Debrisay, 'would not leave an old man without the comforts of religion, because he keepit out of the workhouse?'

'Oh, certainly not,' said Madame, laughing; 'nor do I think any priest I ever knew, Catholic or Protestant, is inclined to neglect a penitent who has something to leave behind him.'

'Ay, priests are all alike; but that's different from ministers; an', considering my years, it was a varra serious attack. Not that I am what you would call old, but then I have had weak health for many years, and sma' care—varra sma' care.'

‘Well, sir, I am sure you have been well tended this time?’

‘I am not denying it! but then it will cost me a lot of siller.’

(He grew intensely Scotch when irritated or uneasy.)

‘Life and health are worth more than gold,’ said Madame Debrisay cheerfully.

‘Nae doot, nae doot! Yet life and health may be poverty struck, and not worth much.’

‘Any way, life is given to us, and we must do the best we can with it,’ quoth Madame Debrisay, who was privately wondering what had become of Mona, as her usual hour for returning was over-past.

‘That’s what few of us do,’ quoth Uncle Sandy, turning to his nephew. ‘I’d like to have a talk with ye the next time you come up here; there are one or two matters I should wish you to consider.’

‘My dear sir, if you wish to speak to Mr Macalister, I will leave you together?’

‘Not the day, not the day,’ said Uncle Sandy. ‘I have no the strength to insist on anything.’

‘I am wondering what keeps Mona?’ said Madame Debrisay; ‘she ought to be here by this time.’

It was a Saturday afternoon, when Kenneth always got away from the City early.

‘There is her ring!’ she exclaimed, the next moment. ‘I’ll go and see what kept her?’

It was a wet, chill afternoon, with wild gusts of wind.

‘Where have you been, my darlin’?’ cried Madame Debrisay, going into the bedroom, where she heard Mona moving about.

‘A very pleasant and unlooked-for *rencontre*,’ returned Mona, who was taking off her damp outdoor garments. ‘I was coming away from Mrs Churchhill’s, when a lady who had just driven up to the door suddenly called me by my name. “Don’t you remember me, Mona?” It was Evelyn. She seemed so pleased to see me! She had only come up to town for a few days, and was going to write to me to come and see her, as she was very hurried. Oh, she was looking *so* well and

happy! She asked me to luncheon to-morrow. She is at their town house in Hyde Park Gardens, and wants to have a long talk. She is just the same as ever, only nicer—at least she seemed so. What a different world she moves in from ours, dear Deb!’

‘Ah! widely different; but you don’t let that fret you, my dear, do you?’

‘No, I don’t fret. Yet I am ashamed to think how I regret that brilliant, easy, abounding existence, where everything is fair and smooth, and neither roughness nor care come to irritate or oppress.’

‘Ah! my darlin’, there are plenty of aching hearts under the smoothness, and poor human nature groans and yearns for what it can’t get, all the same whether it’s in a poor twenty-five shilling a week lodging, or a marble palace.’

‘If that is your opinion, Deb, why were you so angry with me for breaking with Mr Waring?’

‘Well, dear, you see people must live, and as hearts ache, no matter what covers them—sackcloth or satin—you might as well have satin, *and* a marble hall.’

‘That is not a sufficient reason. I suppose that whatever your abstract conviction may be, you grasp grandeur and wealth whenever you have a chance. I fear I am no wiser, dear, for all my romantic talk, only I am greedier than you are, Deb—I wanted love as well as luxury.’

‘Ah, then, didn’t poor Waring give you lashin’s of love?’

‘Perhaps; but if he could not create it in me, what good did his love do me?’

‘I am ashamed of your hard-heartedness, Mona. I expected better things of you.’

‘That is because you always over-rated me.’

‘Never mind. Just go up to your uncle; that wild Highlander has had him all to himself nearly the whole evening.’

.
Mona set out to keep her appointment with Lady Finistoun with mixed feelings of pleasure, and a little irresistible mortification. At twenty, philosophy has not had time to strike its roots very deeply into the soul.

Mona was proud, but her pride had no

tinge of meanness. Of poverty she was not the least ashamed, so long as she was indebted to herself alone. Yet in old and highly artificial societies like ours, poverty is probably the most degrading condition into which man or woman can fall ; but the sting to Mona lay in her consciousness that the disapprobation and neglect of her relatives was in some degree deserved. She had not acted loyally to Waring ; she ought not to have broken faith with him when the immediate cause which forced her to accept him was removed. And he, too, must despise her !

However, all that was irrevocable now. Yet she hoped earnestly that Evelyn would be alone. She did not wish to meet any of her former friends, or rather acquaintances, to be pitied and questioned, however smiling and kind the mask they might put on. This was a contemptible weakness, she confessed to herself, but she could not raise herself above it.

Her ladyship had just gone to luncheon, said the elegant gentleman who opened the door. Would she walk in ?

Mona was shown into a library at the

back of the house, where Evelyn sat at table, *tête-à-tête* with her husband.

‘So glad to see you, dear! Finistoun is obliged to go out, or we should have waited for you, and when we have got rid of him, we shall have such a nice long chat.’

‘Very complimentary to me,’ said Lord Finistoun, bowing, and smiling good-humouredly. ‘Happy to renew my acquaintance with you, though I am afraid you do not remember me.’

‘Yes, I remember you now,’ a quick blush passing over her face.

She did well remember him. At the ball where she had first met Lisle, she had seen him talking long to Lord Finistoun, and fancied they were speaking of herself. He (Lord Finistoun) was very like Kenneth Macalister, only older, better dressed, and less good looking. He was tall and gaunt, but Evelyn was evidently satisfied with him.

In a few minutes Mona felt quite at home.

‘And you are the naughty girl who riled everyone by ejecting your unfortunate *fiancé*,’ said Lord Finistoun, as he helped

her to some cold grouse. 'It was too bad, really. You deserved to be shut up and fed on bread and water.'

'How very ill-bred of you, Finistoun, to mention it,' cried his wife. 'You have no discretion. I will not have Mona teased.'

'I beg pardon if I have offended; but I am sure Miss Joscelyn will forgive me. The poor fellow has gone under. The racecourse and the clubs know him no more. You have a great deal to answer for.'

'He ought to be much obliged to me,' returned Mona, as lightly as she could.

'Perhaps; but then people seldom know what is good for them.'

'A most ungallant speech. Pray remember that Mona has changed her name. She has taken her uncle's.'

'Quite right, if he is going to leave you his fortune. By what name, then, shall I remember you in my prayers?'

'My father's name was Craig, but my poor grandmother always chose to call me by my second Christian name.'

'And why does this rich old uncle choose to live in such a remote region as Westbourne Villas?'

‘I do not think he is rich, and he is only in London for a short time.’

‘Oh, nonsense! He must be rich. Make him take a house near us somewhere. Everyone will be pleased to see you again. Men do not adopt nieces unless they can afford expensive luxuries.’

‘He is very unambitious, and has been seriously ill.’

‘You are sure you have not been administering slow poison in homœopathic globules?’ asked Lord Finistoun. ‘You look a very resolute young woman, Miss Craig.’

A little more light talk, and he left them, after a kindly expressed hope of seeing Mona soon again.

‘I am not at home to anyone,’ said Lady Finistoun, as soon as the servant came back from opening the door.

‘Come up to my room, Mona. We have only a few rooms open, as we go back to Cumberland on Tuesday. Now we shall have a delightful talk. Isn’t Finistoun nice? He is such a good fellow. I thought him so dull and quiet when he came to the Chase—just after you made all that hubbub, dear! I didn’t care about

marrying him much, only he seemed so much in love with me—which nobody ever did before—and now I think him the most charming companion. Isn't he bright and pleasant?'

'He is indeed! I suppose you make him so happy, that his nature has developed, as plants do in sunshine.'

'You are just the same as ever, Mona, with your quiet, funny air of wisdom. I wish you had married Mr Waring. It is really very nice to be married to a kind, generous husband.'

And so on about her own happiness and affairs for nearly an hour, then she exclaimed suddenly,—

'But tell me about yourself! What an awful life you must lead with poor Madame Debrisay! though she is a dear old thing. Do you never go to a dance or— but of course not: you could not know the people about you.'

'I assure you I am not dull. First, because I am busy; then because I have a very agreeable companion. Then we go often to concerts—sometimes to theatres—and even now and then to soirees, where,

if there is not much elegance, you sometimes hear exceedingly clever talk; but we—that is, Madame Debrisay, generally refuses. It costs too much in dress and cab hire.'

'Is it possible! I thought cabs were the most economical mode of getting about! Dearest Mona, I am *so* sorry for you! And how wonderfully well you look!'

'I am well, and happy.'

'Nonsense, dear! I tell you what, you must come and stay with us. I don't care what they say at home, and I will give you some nice dresses.'

'No, no, Evelyn! I have left your sphere for ever. I am not ungrateful to you. You are a kind, generous soul; but I have thrown in my lot with the workers, and I cannot serve *fashion* and mammon. I must earn my bread.'

'It sounds quite awful! I shall persuade you to come to me yet. Do tell me what the uncle is like?'

'Well, he is an ugly, little old man, not too pleasant in temper, and in very indifferent health. He talks like the people

in Sir Walter Scott's novels, and he tries to convert me to Presbyterianism.'

'What a fearful combination! He *must* have money, or he would never presume to be so disagreeable.'

'I see no sign of it in his mode of life or his ideas of expenditure.'

'How is it you let him bore you then?'

'He seems to have thrown himself upon me, while everyone else, except poor dear Deb, has thrown me off—and then I see he is fond of me. There is so much in that. Besides, he is intelligent,—a character, in fact. I feel his hold on me is tightening.'

'Where did you find him?'

Mona gave the history of their first meeting.

'Depend on it, he will prove a "treasure trove." Where does he come from?'

'Somewhere near Glasgow. My father's people were—I scarcely know what—very humble in origin.'

'And where does he live when he is at home?'

'I am not very sure. He has a cottage

in the Western Highlands called "Craigdarroch."

'Craigdarroch!' repeated Lady Finistoun, in great surprise. 'Why, that is close to Strathairlie. I remember hearing that a rich jute manufacturer bought it. Yes, I know all about it now, dearest Mona; it must be the same Mr Craig—a dreadful rich, Radical old miser! You don't mind my saying so, do you?'

'Oh, no! by no means,' returned Mona, laughing. 'It is very curious that you should know anything about him. Still, I cannot believe in his wealth; and he is certainly not a miser.'

'This is a delightful discovery. Finistoun will be quite pleased; and then we shall see you in the autumn. We always go, or will go, to Strathairlie.'

'But perhaps my uncle will not return there.'

'Oh, yes, he will. Do not be so contradictory. My dear love, you will be a wealthy heiress yet! Craigdarroch is quite a lovely place. And there is a farm—a good large farm, and fishing rights attached it, etc., etc.'

Talk flowed freely, till Mona, observing the hour, insisted on taking leave.

‘It is pouring rain. Do let me send you home in a cab!’

‘No, dear Evelyn. You shall not send me in a cab. I will take one myself, for I do not wish to spoil my best gown.’

‘What a rebellious subject you are! I protest I feel a load taken off my mind when I think you have a rich uncle in the toils. Keep fast hold of him.’





CHAPTER III.

A DILEMMA.



ADAME DEBRISAY'S words respecting Mona's sacrifices for her uncle had sunk into his soul.

He was generally a taciturn individual; but at times communicative fits would seize him, of which, when they were past, he seemed half ashamed.

Mona's absence on the Sunday afternoon when she had lunched with Lady Finistoun, was a stumbling-block and rock of offence.

'Leddy Finistoun, indeed,' he muttered, not addressing anyone in particular. 'She and her people would have left the girlie

to starve, and she must run back to eat of her bread. That's not the right spirit.'

'But, uncle,' said Mona, who was looking for the City article in the *Times*, 'Evelyn was always fond of me. She is not responsible for what her people did.'

'Eh! They are all birds of the same feather. I'd have nowt to do wi' them.'

'Lady Finistoun sought me, uncle. It would have been ungracious to reject her advances.'

'Oh! gang yer ain gate. The young always know better than the old and experienced.'

Mona did not reply, and there was a pause. She found the article she had been looking for, and had just begun to read when Uncle Sandy stopped her, exclaiming,—

'Bide a bit. I want to speak to you.'

She laid down the newspaper, a little alarmed at the ominous beginning.

'Tell me truth,' he resumed. 'How are you paid for your singing lessons?'

'Oh, mine are merely preparatory lessons! so I do not get much.'

'Ay, but how much?'

‘Three shillings a lesson, or thirty for twelve.’

‘Hum! ha! well!’—pulling out his purse—‘there are three sovereigns for you. Madam told me you put off some pupils that ye might give your time to me, and I can nae forget it. I doubt if anyone ever did so much for me before. Now I don’t want you to suffer loss through me. There, tak’ the gowd; ye’re welcome. Before that is gone, ye’ll maybe find other pupils.’

‘But, Uncle Sandy, I would rather not! Indeed I would rather not! I am sure I shall soon find other pupils, and—and I have a little money of my own—more than a hundred and twenty pounds. I was quite ready to give up the lesson that I might be with you. You were not fit to be left alone. I will not take the money.’

‘Nor will I take it back.’

‘You must indeed,’ she persisted.

‘Hoot, toot! a young creature like you needn’t hesitate to take it from her nearest of kin. Here, pit it in yer pocket.’

‘Let us make a bargain, uncle!’ cried Mona gaily. ‘I do not want the money now, but when I do I’ll ask for it.’

‘Ay, but I misdoubt me if you will: you have too much pride. Not but that I like your independent spirit—that comes from the Craigs. I’ll just pit up the money in a bit paper, and it will be ready whenever you want it.’

‘Thank you, uncle. I will ask for it *if* I want it; but I hope I shall not. Do you know that Lord and Lady Finistoun are your neighbours at Craigdarroch?’

‘Ay, I knew the name; but I did not give them a thocht. I remember now, the Laird o’ Strathairlie used to be down in the shooting-time, with a wild, feckless lot—loons that just consume the fruits of the airth, and never add a bawbee to the nation’s wealth.’

‘Still, I suppose they do some good, by giving employment and spending money?’

‘I’m no that sure. They create a fause demand and a useless class—men that just minister to other men’s pleasure are never good for anything: there’s something degrading in it. If ye come down and see me in my bit Hieland home, I hope these fine folk won’t come haverin’ after you. I canna be fashed wi’ siclike kittle cattle.’

'I don't suppose they would trouble me much, only Evelyn, who is really fond of me, I believe; and I should greatly enjoy Craigdarroch. The Highlands must be delightful, from Kenneth's account.'

'Ay; he can talk grand. He is a braw laddie. You are good friends, you twa?'

'Very good. Kenneth interests me, he is so fresh and original.'

'He is too self-opinionated; but he is an honest lad, and his mother, my half-sister, was aye nearest to me of my kin, though I loved your father weel till he went an' married like a fule! I must look after Kenneth and provide for him, for her sake. Her heart was bound up in him; and for a' his bone and muscle, he's no that strong.'

'Yes, Uncle Sandy, you ought to take care of him. He is indeed your natural heir.'

'Natural heir indeed!' quoth Uncle Sandy wrathfully. 'Naeboddy is my heir or heiress beyond what I choose. I can leave all I possess to an institution or an hospital to-morrow.'

'Of course you could,' said Mona indifferently.

‘Then let me hear nae mair of heirs and heiresses!’

‘Very well. Shall I read now?’

‘Ay, and dinna go too fast.’

But the lecture did not seem to give satisfaction till she came to the ‘Price Current,’ when some of the quotations seemed to arouse a keen and pleasurable interest in her hearer.

‘Ay,’ he muttered. ‘Spanish four cents, forty-eight and a quarter, ex-dividend. That’s good;—time to sell. Hum! Union Pacific, three-fourths down; that will do. Where is Kenneth? He hasn’t come nigh us this Sawbath.’

‘He said he was going to church with his friend young Macleod, and was to sup with him after.’

‘He’s always awa’ when he is wanted. Write him a note; nay, a halfpenny card will do as well. Tell him—stay, I’ll write myself, though it is the Sawbath. There are some things will na’ keep, and the Lord’s Day is not the same this side of the border.’

‘Just so, uncle. When in Rome, do as Rome does.’

‘Ay ; when will a note reach him ?’

‘I daresay at ten to-morrow morning.’

‘That will do fine. Give me my book an’ the ink. I canna afford to lose time.’

With many a muttered, inarticulate, self-addressed comment, and a more distinct complaint of his dim eyes, his unsteady hand, his general debility and rapid decline, he managed to fill two sides of note paper, which he put in an envelope and carefully fastened up, requesting Mona to address it to her cousin. Then he sat silently watching her.

‘Ye’ll send it safe and sure to the post ?’

‘Certainly ; I will go myself. The servant is out, and so is Madame Debrisay. The post-pillar is within a hundred yards.’

‘Ay, do—that’s a kind lassie ; and you’ll come back to me ? I am varra weary the night ! Eh, but I am worn wi’ poor health mair than wi’ years.’

Mona returned immediately, but was received with silence. The old man seemed wrapped in thought. Mona took up the paper and began to read a criticism on the last batch of novels.

‘Ay, he is a braw laddie,’ said Uncle

Sandy suddenly, as if out of his thoughts ;
'and I am glad you like him so weel.'

'I suppose you mean Kenneth ? Yes, I like him very much, and I am sorry he is obliged to be in an office. I am sure he is not happy.'

'Hoots ! what does he want then ? To be an idle, fine gentleman, and make the grand tower maybe ? He must just earn his bread by the sweat of his brow like us a'.'

'But he might do so more happily behind the plough : he is not suited to a city office. Could you not find work for him on your land, or even in the Colonies ?'

'I didn't think I'd ever hear you havering that fashion. I thought you had mair sense.'

'I am afraid I am weak enough to shrink so from doing what I do not like myself—that I sympathise too much with Kenneth.'

'Seempathise ! eh ? Weel, sympathy is a fine feelin'.'

After this he lapsed into silence, from which he only roused himself to go to bed.

The next evening, and the next, Ken-

neth was closeted with his uncle. After these interviews, he stayed but a very short time with Madame Debrisay and Mona—nor did they seem to exercise an enlivening effect on the young Scot; indeed, Madame Debrisay remarked upon his depression, and surmised that he was in debt, and afraid to ask his uncle for help.

‘And no wonder,’ added the kindly Irishwoman. ‘I’m sure I’d rather go into a den of raging lions, than face your uncle if I wanted money from him. I am sorry to say it, but it’s wicked to grab money as tight as he does; and I like the young man, though I don’t like to see him come between his uncle and yourself.’

‘I do not fancy Kenneth has a debt or a money difficulty in the world; but he does seem to have something on his mind.’

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The following Sunday was fine and crisp, though still and grey. Christmas was close at hand once more, and Mona was thankful to think that the year had been peaceful, and free from any fresh misfortunes.

Kenneth came immediately after the early dinner, and asked Mona to take a walk with him. She readily complied, and they were soon on their way to their favourite recreation ground, Kensington Gardens.

Kenneth was unusually silent. He answered Mona's remarks as briefly as possible, seeming embarrassed and preoccupied. At length, having skirted the round pond, they slackened their pace as they got under the shelter of the trees, and walked down the wide glade towards the Serpentine.

'What is the matter, Kenneth?' asked Mona; 'I fancy you have something on your mind. I think you might tell me. You know I take an interest in you, and sympathise with you.'

'Ah! that's just what my uncle says.' This with a profound sigh. 'Yes, I have something very particular to say, only I cannot say it.'

'That is very unfortunate, as I want to hear it. Do you want me to break anything to Uncle Sandy?'

'No; he knows—that is, he is at the bottom of it all.'

‘Are you in any trouble, Kenneth?’

‘Well, indeed, and I am.’

‘Could I help you?’

‘Maybe you might; but it’s hard to tell.’

‘Try, Kenneth—this is getting serious—try to tell me.’

‘Weel!’ said Kenneth, thus urged, growing very red, and speaking with a stronger accent than usual, ‘Uncle Sandy wants me to marry you, and I cannot, Mona. I cannot, indeed! I have pledged my troth to another young lady, and could not break my word.’

Mona stopped short in utter amazement, and looked straight at her companion.

‘How very unkind of you!’ she exclaimed. ‘I did not think you would reject me.’

‘Eh? That’s what my uncle says. He believes you are very fond o’ me, but I cannot see it; and, oh! Mona, he swears he will leave all his money away from both of us if we don’t marry; and I will never call any woman wife but my sweet Mary—little Mary Black—the schoolmaster’s daughter!’

A kindly, amused smile slowly dimpled round Mona's mouth.

‘ Did you tell him so ? ’

‘ Well, I daren't, you see. I have had hopes that he (Uncle Sandy) would help me—I mean us—for I think he meant me to be his heir before he met you.’

‘ Believe me, Kenneth, I will not interfere with you. Now, I'll help you to the best of my ability ; but first—please to propose to me in due form.’

‘ You understand I am pledged to Mary.’

‘ Do not mention her at present.’

‘ Well, then ; will you marry me, Mona ? ’

‘ No, Kenneth. I feel honoured by your offer, but I decidedly decline. There now, the blame of disobedience rests with me. You can tell Uncle Sandy that I refused you.’

‘ You are a clever deil, Mona, and kind ; but this is not varra honest.’

‘ No, it is not ; but my uncle ought not to be so foolish as to turn matchmaker. Now he will attack me, and I can take care of myself. You can keep quiet, and by-and-by—when I have utterly refused

you—then propose to marry “your ain true love,” and my uncle will yield.’

‘I am not sure! Ye see, his idea is that I should marry, and live with him at Craigdarroch—that I should mind the farm, and you the house, and then come in for everything after. He’ll be dreadfully disappointed, for he is awful fond of you, Mona, and I am not surprised; you are a real braw lassie. You’ve a lad o’ your own somewhere awa’, I’ll be bound—a lassie like you could not want a lover.’

‘The place is vacant at present, Kenneth, and you see you are unfortunately bespoken,’ she said, laughing.

‘Eh, but you have made my heart light!’ he exclaimed. ‘I did not think you would have me; but Uncle Sandy was that positive, I gave into him. Maybe if I had not left my heart behind me and taken to you, our uncle’s wish might have been fulfilled.’

‘Just so, Kenneth. As it is, we will manage our affairs as best we can.’

‘What can we say when we go in?’

‘The position is rather strained, as politicians say. You must go and confess first

Then I suppose I shall be sent for, and I shall trust to the inspiration of the moment.'

'It's awful trying,' said Kenneth, who was greatly disturbed. 'It will be years and years before Uncle Sandy comes round—he is so obstinate and self-opinionated. And hard as it is to wait, I could stand that; but Mr Black is in a very weak state, and should he die, Mary and her mother will be homeless. For Jamie the eldest brother's a ne'er-do-weel, and Robbie's on the sea.'

'We must try and coax Uncle Sandy to do the right thing. He would be very happy at Craigdarroch, with you and Mary to take care of him.'

'You are too kind,' said Kenneth, his dark eyes growing moist. 'The good God has sent you to me for a true friend and sister.'

'Ah! there spoke your gratitude to me for rejecting you!' cried Mona, holding out her hand to him. 'There, let us swear friendship and fidelity, and determination to guide Uncle Sandy in the way he should go.'

'You are a fery clever young woman.

I do not know if there is a cleverer whatever. And you really will bear me no enmity because I cannot marry you?'

'I think, Kenneth, by much perseverance and "wrestling in prayer," as Uncle Sandy says, I may overcome the bitterness of this moment.'

'Ah, Mona, you are making a mock at me. You would not, if you just knew how my heart sinks when I think what a long weary waiting lies between me and Mary.'

There was profound sadness in his voice.

'But I do not mock you, Kenneth,' cried Mona, touched by his tone. 'I feel with and for you, and I will do my very best to help you. We will manage Uncle Sandy. Now, for the rest of our walk, you shall tell me all about Mary from the very first.'

'Then I must begin at the beginning of my life, for Mary is just bound up with it.'

'Go on,' said Mona, looking up in his face with a sunny smile, and Kenneth 'went on' considerably.

Mona was sincerely interested. It was but a homely tale, yet it was glorified by gleams of true feeling, of tenderness almost womanly in its delicacy, of warmest desire

to shield the dear one from trouble or roughness. And then the setting of the picture among grey rocks and purple heather, gleaming lochs, and clear brown rushing streams, soft mist, and driving storm, was delightfully suggested by Kenneth's incidental descriptions. There was a day when a 'spate' was on the river, and he helped Mary over the stepping-stones; another, when he landed a big salmon, while she looked on; a third, when he rowed her and her mother across the loch; and yet a fourth, when he coaxed her to wander away with him to a rent in the mountain side, called the Devil's Dyke, and a storm overtook them.

Mona listened with a curious mixed sense of sympathy and envy. Would any human being ever love her with the same deep yearning affection? How old her experiences made her feel beside this free unselfish love. How much more true manhood there was in this unstinted, generous eagerness to share all good with the best beloved, than in the cold, hard, worldly wisdom that prompted Lisle to hand over the woman he had tried to win to

another, at the first chill breath of coming trouble.

Kenneth felt a new creature when he was thus enabled to unbosom himself. Thoughts uttered seem so much stronger than they do while lurking in the shadowy recesses of the heart.

By the time they reached Westbourne Villas, he had talked himself into a conviction that his wedding was not so far off after all. But at the garden gate, terrible reality grasped him and looked him in the face. Within those walls Uncle Sandy awaited him.

‘He will be awful angry, Mona,’ whispered Kenneth, pausing before he rang the bell.

‘I daresay he will’—(it was not necessary to name the object of their dread)—‘but you must throw all the blame on me,—remember, Kenneth, it is quite true. If there was no Mary in the case, I could not marry you.’

‘There will be somebody else then,’ he said, with innocent conceit.

‘Never mind about that, Kenneth. Think so if you like; but do not be too

positive with Uncle Sandy. If he chooses to hope a little, let him.'

When they went in, Mona retired to take off her cloak and hat, and Kenneth, with slow, reluctant steps, went up to face Uncle Sandy.

'Oh, Deb!' cried Mona, throwing herself into a chair beside that good lady, who, on the door being opened, hastily hid the stocking she had been darning under the table. 'Oh, Deb, support me! I have been cruelly and heartlessly rejected by Kenneth Macalister.'

'Why! *Grand Dieu!* What do you mean?' asked Madame Debrisay impatiently, while she hunted vigorously for her needle. 'Ah! here it is! Now don't talk riddles and conundrums.'

Whereupon Mona repeated the substance of her conversation with Kenneth.

'Why, what has come to that cantankerous cripple, your uncle, that he should think of such a marriage for you? That long-legged Highlander isn't fit to wipe your shoes—a creature that has only exchanged his native wilds for a den of thieves in the City. Why he isn't fit to sit

in the same room with you. You know I have always stood up for your uncle, even when there was no denying he is a naygur'—(Irish for mean miser)—'but I wash my hands of him now.'

'You are too indignant,' began Mona; but madame did not heed her.

'I would like him to see you as I have, in the most distinguished society of London, with the most distinguished men in it at your feet.'

'He would need an enormously magnifying power of perception if he ever beheld such a sight as that,' said Mona, laughing. 'Nor will I allow you to speak contemptuously of Kenneth. He is a fine fellow and a true gentleman—far truer than the distinguished individuals you fancy you saw at my feet. He is deeply attached to a Highland Mary of his own, and we have agreed to bring round Uncle Sandy to agree to the match. Poor Uncle Sandy had evidently intended to make Kenneth his heir. Now he has met me, he wants to make all straight by uniting our rival claims and ourselves.'

'Claims indeed! Why you are his

nearest of kin, and ought to have all he has, except, perhaps, a legacy to buy a plough or a fishing-rod for his cateran of a nephew. Not that I dislike the boy. He is a good-looking, well-disposed fellow. But this notion of your uncle's is a dreadful dilemma. It is quite possible he will take offence at you both, and maybe leave everything he possesses to the kirk — kirk or church they are all alike for grabbing gold. I hate priests of every denomination!' concluded the good-natured heathen, recommencing her darning with such fierce energy that she pricked her finger, whereat she indulged in some very strong French expressions.

'There is Uncle Sandy's bell. Do come with me, Deb. You will be a shield both to Kenneth and myself.'

'Ah! can't you let me finish my stockings in peace. *Le vieux Tartufe* would faint at the sight of needle and thread on the Sabbath, and I haven't a minute to myself other days. I daresay if he could make sixpence-halfpenny by skinning a flint on the "Sawbath," he'd find it was to the interests of true releegion to do so.'

‘Come, come, Deb. Uncle Sandy has plenty of faults and crotchets, but you shall not paint him blacker than he is. Why have you turned against him?’

‘He hasn’t a spark of true generosity. You gave up time and teaching for him, and what did he do for you?’

‘He offered to pay my losses.’

‘Ah! what was a paltry three pounds? Is he the man to say, “Here’s a fifty pound note, my darlin’, to buy you a frock—though nothing could ever pay for the light of your sweet face beside me; that would be like a Christian.’

‘The wildest dreams of fancy could not depict Uncle Sandy making such a speech; and, Deb, though he may be able to live with a certain degree of comfort, it does not follow he is rich.’

‘Oh! he could not live without heaping up riches.’

‘Come along, and be reasonable.’

It was an agreeable surprise to find Uncle Sandy not cross, only a little melancholy. He was low about himself, and commissioned Kenneth to interview the secretary of the funeral company and ascer-

tain what would be the cost of removing a 'corp' to the 'auld kirkyard at Strathairlie.' Finally he made Madame Debrisay feel unhappily prophetic, by telling him to seek out the minister of Balmuir, whom Kenneth had met in Cheapside a few days before, and request him to call on a former parishioner.





CHAPTER IV.

DIPLOMACY.

KENNETH MACALISTER lost no time in giving Mona the result of his dreaded interview with Uncle Sandy.

He was not, Kenneth said, so vexed as might have been expected. He told his nephew not to be down-hearted; that his offer was, perhaps, unexpected like, and he could not suppose a lassie—a very superior young lady—would jump at the first word,—that he (Kenneth) must persevere, and come often to the house—perseverance could accomplish much. Uncle Sandy had set his pertinacious mind on the marriage. All, however, might go well, if only no breath of the project reached Mary's ears.

‘I am exceedingly glad I may go and see you often,’ concluded Kenneth. ‘For this great stony wilderness of a town has seemed a good deal more homelike since I knew you.’

Things then went on in much the usual routine for some months. Mr Craig grew stronger, and able to hobble to and fro at different kirks from that which he at first attended—the minister being known to his brother clerico of Balmuir, who, by the way, never made his appearance at Westbourne Villas. A letter introducing Uncle Sandy was forwarded to the former, so the two Scotsmen enjoyed an occasional ‘crack’ together, which sometimes ended in a somewhat acrimonious dispute.

Mr Craig, as the busy season advanced, complained a good deal of his lonely days; but Madame Debrisay, who rose in his estimation as she grew more self-asserting and less complaisant, explained to him that, with the strong necessity of earning her bread and forming a *clientèle*, Mona was bound to take as many pupils as she could get.

On this Mr Craig fell into a brown

study, and in the evening, when Mona went to read to him, expressed regret that he had let Craighdarroch for so long a time, adding,—

‘I might as well be there as here, for all the company I get.’

‘At least I can read to you in the evening, Uncle Sandy.’

‘Ay, I know it’s not your fault! Do you think you would like to live at Craighdarroch?’

‘Certainly, in the summer. I am not so sure about the winter-time; unfortunately, there are no pupils to be found there.’

‘If you had a good husband, you would not need them.’

‘But as you would say, uncle, a husband now-a-days is ill to seek.’

‘You might have a braw one for the taking, said Uncle Sandy, looking keenly at her.

This was the first approach he had ever made to the dreaded subject, and Mona, though by no means deficient in courage, shrank from it.

‘It is a serious matter to take anyone for a husband,’ she said, colouring. ‘I like my liberty.’

‘Liberty is no good for women,’ he returned, for Uncle Sandy had by no means a high estimation of the fair sex. ‘And Mona, my lassie, your old uncle’s heart is set on seeing you a happy wife.’

‘Thank you, uncle, I should like to please you, but we must be sure of the happiness.’

He opened his mouth to reply, but some wave of thought arrested his words, and he closed it again. He was, however, cross and contradictory all the evening, and Mona knew he was not well pleased.

Meanwhile the usual round of London life ran its course. Parliament assembled. New players and old favourites enchanted the public. Fresh scandals, and novelties of toilettes, enlivened the pages of society papers. Another batch of little girls were promoted from the nursery to the school-room, and both Madame Debrisay and Mona’s hands were full.

Lady Finistoun’s name at drawing-room, dinner, ball, and garden-party frequently met Mona’s eye as she looked through the papers for the articles most suited for Uncle Sandy’s consumption. Yet

she made no sign. Kind and pleasant though she was when face to face with her friend, the rush of the season, the number of attractive engagements, crowded out those who were not constantly present with her, from Evelyn's mind.

She did write once, begging Mona to come and have a cup of tea with her at an hour when she would not meet anyone, but Mona thought it wiser not to go.

'If you stay late in London, I will come when the tide of gaiety is ebbing. You would hardly have time to speak to me while it is the flood,' she wrote in reply.

By some slip in conversation, Madame Debrisay managed to make this invitation, and the reply, known to Mr Craig, who seemed a good deal impressed by it.

May set in with unusual warmth, dry east winds prevailing, and Uncle Sandy grew discontented with his food, restless at night, feverish by day, dissatisfied with his liver, and suspicious of his digestive organs.

'I am no sae sure that Sir Andrew Colman gives me that attention he ought, sidering a' the guineas he has had from

me! Mr Maclean' (this was the minister) 'advises me to try that man in Saville Row, Dr Carmichael; they say he is wonderful for liver and digestion; and I am regular out of sorts.'

'Well I would, Mr Craig,' said Madame Debrisay, to whom Uncle Sandy confided his doubts and intentions; 'you have not been looking at all well—not a bit like yourself of late. I have felt rather uneasy about you. Perhaps a new doctor may observe something that has escaped the other. Maybe change of air might do you good.'

'Haven't I had a total change coming here? and last year I felt a new man! How is a puir frail body like me to go wandering about by my ain sell? Why the cure wad be worse than the sickness.'

'Still, my dear sir, it is well worth while to face some difficulties rather than not recover your precious health.'

'I know it—I know it,' he growled impatiently; 'and I am just thinking what's best to be done. I'll get Mona to write and ask for an appointment, when she comes in.'

‘ I am sure, Mr Craig, my poor pen is quite at your service.’

‘ Oh, thank’ee, thank’ee ; I’ll just wait till my niece comes in.’

Mr Craig was quite nervous about his visit to a new doctor, and at length expressed a wish that Madame Debrisay should accompany him to the doctor’s house, though he did not wish her to be present at the interview.

‘ Why did you not say so at once ? ’ she cried. ‘ I should have offered to go with you, but seeing you are a particular man, I did not like to intrude.’

‘ Intrude ! Why, no, of course you would not. I did think of taking my nephew, but it is not easy for him to get away from business.’

‘ Do not think of it, my dear sir. I am, you know, quite an experienced nurse, and when Dr Carmichael makes an appointment, I will arrange to go with you. You are not really fit to go alone.’

‘ You are varra good. I shall be much indebted to you.’

For the remainder of the day Uncle Sandy was amiable enough ; but, as is not

uncommon, when the immediate sense of obligation wears off, the politeness it engenders also disappears, and next day Uncle Sandy was as querulous as ever.

‘I believe his digestion is all wrong, poor man, and his eyes are like boiled gooseberries, but there is nothing else the matter with him. He is shaky on his legs, certainly, though I rather think that’s just nervous fancies. I doubt his dying before he is a hundred, he is so contradictory.’

‘Why, Deb, you would not cut short his little span of life? If I thought you were serious, I should be quite angry with you.’

‘I would not do the poor soul the smallest harm, God knows; but he is very trying, and I don’t think he cares a straw about any mortal but himself.’

‘I think he cares a good deal about himself, but he is affectionate too. He is fond of me; he begins to cling to me, I am almost sorry to say, for in some measure it binds me to him. One cannot desert a creature that depends on you. Still, he is not an enlivening companion.’

‘All I hope is he will not prove an un-

grateful old hunks after you have sacrificed your youth to him.'

'My youth, Deb? I feel as if my youth had gone—quite gone.'

'Ah! what nonsense you talk! Gone, only to come back again. My dear child, there's been more wrong with you than the death of your poor dear grandmother, or the loss of your fortune, or even your rejection of that poor fellow.'

'Is that not a sufficient catalogue, Deb? What more do you want?' and Mona sat down to work, but really to think.

Since Kenneth's confession, she had thought more of Waring than she had ever done before. Did he love her with the same honest, enduring love that the young Highlander bore to his Mary? Hardly. Kenneth and Mary had grown up together, and the power of association was interwoven with the warmth of early passion. Then a simple life of duty and enforced self-denial deepens the channels of the heart, while an existence of mere pleasure, of constant friction with calculating, cynical men of the world, has an indurating effect. The emotions and affections

spread thinly in a shallow stream over a stony surface, through which no fertilising drops can percolate to the hollow beneath. Still, the impression remained with her that there were possibilities of true tenderness in Waring, which might have made her life happy, had her wounds not been so sore and recent that they could not endure the touch of a new love. She never regretted having broken with him, but she grieved to think that from a wish to provide for her grandmother, she had caused him so much pain. The recollection, too, of his aspect when she had accidentally seen him in the street, haunted her. Could her refusal have influenced him for evil?

.
The day that Uncle Sandy went to consult the well-known Dr Carmichael, Mona was rather late, and went up to his sitting-room before she took off her hat.

She found him at his evening meal—a chop and some dry toast—while Madame Debrisay was busy over a cup of cocoa, which she was making with the help of a kettle and spirit-lamp.

‘Well, uncle, what did the doctor say?’

‘Not much. He evidently thinks I am in a bad way. He went so far as to say that medicine could do me varra little good. He just altered my diet a bit. I am not to touch tea or coffee, only a wee drap whisky in cold water ; and he has ordered me to a foreign place I never heard tell of before. That’s the worst. If I’m to dee, let me have one of my ain to close my eyes. Out of London I will not go, unless you come with me, Mona.’

‘My dear uncle, this is very serious. Where are you to go?’

‘To a queer, out-of-the-way water-drinking toun c’ad Con - ter - x - ville, away in France. Madame there seems to know about it, as she does about most things.’

Mona looked at her.

‘Yes, dear,’ cried madame briskly, as she blew out the lamp, and carried the cup to the invalid. ‘The waters are admirable for gout, and rheumatism, and liver, and indigestion, and all sorts of things. It is a well-known water in France. Monsieur Le Duc de Monceau and Madame La Marquise de Surêsenes both derived the greatest benefit from the cure.’

‘And whereabouts is it?’

‘Oh, on the German side; in the Department of the Vosges, not very far from Nancy.’

‘It’s an awfu’ lang journey,’ groaned Uncle Sandy, ‘and will cost a mine o’ siller.’

‘Not more than a journey to any other health resort, my dear Mr Craig. We will ascertain the rail fares. You are not going away all in a minute. We have time enough to look about us.’

‘And will you come with me, dearie?’ asked Uncle Sandy, looking wistfully at Mona. ‘I *canna* go without you!’

‘If I can go I will, uncle; but I must hear a little more.’

‘It’s just awfu’ to be alone in this wicked world, and neither chick nor child to fight for you. You ought to think on that, Mona; and get me a little mair toast, like a good lassie—my appetite is varra indifferent.’

‘He has just devoured a rackful!’ whispered Madame Debrisay; ‘one round more is as much as he ought to have.’

Mona waited downstairs till the toast

was ready, considering what answer she should make to her uncle's request, though she well knew that she would end by accompanying him. How could she refuse the poor old man, who seemed to look to her for help and comfort? Yet how much pleasanter it would be to stay and work, and be free with Madame Debrisay!

When she carried back the toast, and Uncle Sandy had finished it, he said he could have a little sleep if he were left quiet, and would make up his mind what he would do next day.

Then Madame Debrisay and her young *protégée* held high counsel as to what should be done.

Mona avowed her reluctance, yet made up her mind to accompany her uncle.

'I am young, you see, Deb; and after a few months' absence, I might pick up my pupils again.'

'No doubt you could, dear,' cried Madame Debrisay; 'anyway, I will represent things to him in a proper light. If he drags you away from your employment, he ought to make a settlement upon

you. What I am afraid of, is that he will spoil your prospects, and leave you in the lurch. I can't get over the notion that young Macalister will come in for everything.'

'Pray do not try to drive a bargain about me, Deb! I must do the best I can. If poor Uncle Sandy never were to leave me a sou, I could not refuse him my company or my help. "*Fais ce que doit —advienne que pourra.*"'

'Oh, it's all very fine to do what you ought, come what may! but Heaven always takes care of those who take care of themselves!'

'You have not acted on that principle yourself, Deb; neither can I. Just let me go, and leave the morrow to take care of itself.'

The day following Mr Craig spent in gloomy silence; and when Kenneth Macalister came in the evening, contrary to his usual custom, no message was sent to request the ladies would come and make tea for him. Kenneth remained till Mr Craig's bedtime, and only looked in on Madame Debrisay and Mona for a few moments. He said his uncle was much

depressed, and in a very bad temper. Kenneth himself seemed pre-occupied, and by no means in good spirits. He said he would be up again in an evening or two, and Mona fancied his tone was rather significant.

The next day Uncle Sandy had brisked up again. He begged Mona to come to him as soon as she returned from her work, which happened to terminate earlier on that day than on any other.

She guessed what that invitation meant, and only hoped that no allusion to Kenneth would add to her difficulties. Yet she felt extremely reluctant to give up the increasing independence of her present position—to be the nurse and companion to so uncertain a person as her uncle. True, she was often weary after a day of continuous teaching,—often irritated and discouraged by careless, stupid pupils—but her day's troubles ended with the last lesson, and the quiet of their homelike lodgings and the sympathy of her devoted protectress awaited her.

However, the old man sorely needed her help, and she would not refuse it.

As soon as she had changed her dress, for the day was wet and stormy, she went upstairs, and found her uncle seated near the fire, the table drawn up beside his chair, and on it a map, a guide-book, a Continental Bradshaw, and several scraps of ruled paper covered with figures.

‘Come awa’! come awa’!’ he cried, his brow clearing; ‘I’m wearyin’ to talk to you. My puir head is just dazed with trying to understand whaur I’m going, and what it will cost me!’

‘As to where you are going, uncle, I may help you to find out; but as to the cost, you must ask Madame Debrisay; she knows all about French railways.’

‘And when will she be in?’

‘Not till six, or half-past.’

‘Aweel, I have something quite private to say to your own self, and I’d best tackle that first.’

He stopped abruptly, and began to gather up the papers and books somewhat nervously.

‘I am all attention, uncle.’

‘It’s a delicate matter to speak about, but I feel bound to do it, for your ain

good, and—and benefit ; and so I'll just speak my mind.'

This with some hesitation, ending with a sudden assumption of resolution, steadily avoiding his niece's eyes at the same time.

'Certainly, Uncle Sandy.'

'There's that lad Kenneth,' he went on, in his thin, high-pitched, querulous voice ; 'a fine young man, steady and weel-disposed ; what for canna you mak' up your mind to wed him ? He's awfu' fond of you, and ye seem good friends together. Why canna you mak' it up ?'

'I thought,' returned Mona gravely and calmly, though she felt that the tug of war had come ; 'I thought I told Kenneth that though I liked and valued him, I feared I could not give him wifely affection. He ought to have been satisfied.'

'And wha wad tak' a lassie's first "no" ?'

'First or last, my dear uncle, my answer would be the same.'

'And what hinders you frae liking him for your husband ?'

'Who can tell uncle ? perhaps liking him too well in another way.'

‘Ah! but I am sorry for the puir lad. He is varra fond o’ ye.’

‘Well, yes, I think he likes me, but I do not think he would ever have asked me to be his wife of his own free will. It was to please you, uncle.’

‘Ah, ha! Is it a bit jealousy? Don’t you think he loves you weel enough?’

‘No, uncle. I would never accept him.’

‘Dinna say it!’ cried Uncle Sandy earnestly. ‘I am just in a difficulty. Ye see, I always promised to look after Kenneth before I knew I should ever see my poor brother’s girlye. Aweel, I’d like to leave my bit o’ money to both of you, and ye see, if you were wed, it would be keepit together.’

‘Dear uncle,’ said Mona, smiling, ‘do not let that trouble you. Leave everything you like to Kenneth; men want money much more than women, and I am young. I think I can earn my own bread with Madame Debrisay’s help; so do not let any thought of me interfere with Kenneth. I have made up my mind to be your escort to Contrexéville, and I hope you will return so well as to be quite independent of us all.’

‘Eh! that will never be, my lassie—never! But you have disappointed me; only I don’t give up yet. I have just set my heart on a match between you and Kenneth. Eh! we’d a’ be happy at Craigdarroch; he’d look to the lands and the beasties, and you would mind the hoose and watch your puir auld uncle’s last days. Then a’ would be yours,—I’d know you were both settled and comfortable, and that the place would be in the hands o’ my ain kin.’

‘Yes; it would be a very pleasant arrangement. I wish I could encourage you to hope for its completion.’

‘I dinna like unreasonable contradiction, an’ I will not put up with it,’ said Uncle Sandy angrily. ‘What for will you be so foolish?’

‘Do you believe that human love is the growth of human will, uncle?’

‘I’m sure I canna tell.’ He paused and thought for a moment, a change passing over his face. ‘Yes; but I did though,’ he said. ‘I tried hard to keep frae loving my old master’s daughter, and I could not. Eh! I had a sair heart in those days. I

daured na speak, for she was a rich heiress, and I but a puir lad. Yet I think—I always thought she cast a kindly look upon me. However, there came a grand gentleman from England, and they married her to him. She did not live long after. Maybe she'd have had a longer and a happier life if she had been my wife, and lived in her ain country.'

Mona listened with a curious mixture of sympathy and amusement. There was true pathos in his voice; yet the evident self-conceit that made him quite sure he had but to ask to be accepted, struck her as too comical when she gazed at his insignificant, shrunken figure, his short, shrewd face, and contemptuously upturned nose. Had he ever been a man on whom a lady might have loved to look? Still there was at times a kindly expression about his mouth which belied the keen hardness of his eyes.

'Yes, uncle,' she said softly, 'it must have been a trying time. That useless struggle ought to teach you how hard it is to govern "unruly wills and affections," and to leave Kenneth and me to follow our own devices.'

‘Answer me one question. Have you a fancy for any other man, or are you pledged to any other?’

‘Neither, uncle; I can assure you unhesitatingly.’

‘Aweel then, I’ll just possess my soul with patience; but it’s bad takin’ you awa, just when you and the lad are good company to each other; but I must, I must, and I canna go without you.

‘Never mind, uncle. Whether we “keep company” or not, it will all come to the same in the end.’

Uncle Sandy kept silence for a moment or two, and his brow contracted; but there was something in Mona’s indescribable superiority—her kindly, gentle, but distinct independence—that he dared not flout.

‘Weel, weel!’ he said at length; ‘you’ll come with me, anyhow?’

‘Yes, certainly, uncle. Just make up your mind when you will start, and I will make due preparation.’

Here Madame Debrisay made her appearance, and sentiment was merged in finance.

Uncle Sandy was positively aghast at

the torrent of information poured forth by the capable Franco-Irishwoman.

‘Let me see’—pulling over the map—
‘Contrexéville? I can’t make it out here, but I was at Domreny once—when my poor husband was alive—and it’s not far from Contrex. I daresay the fare will be close on forty francs—that’s eighty for the two of you—and the through fare by Calais—you must take the shortest route, Dieppe or Havre would be the death of you—is something like seventy-two, say seventy—that’s a hundred and forty, and a night in Paris, sixty or seventy; and cabs, and *fiacres*, and luggage, and *douceurs*, and refreshments on the way, will run into fifty or fifty-five more; that’s a hundred and forty, and eighty; two hundred and twenty, and sixty; two hundred and eighty—three hundred and forty in round numbers.’

‘Lord’s sake, woman!’ cried Uncle Sandy, startled out of all propriety, ‘if you are counting by hundreds, I’d better stay here and dee, while I have siller left to carry my puir body back to Strathairlie.’

‘Oh, don’t take fright, my dear sir;

remember the hundreds do not represent pounds. I'll tell you the total in English money ; we will just make it three hundred and fifty to save time and trouble (that is, reckoning four pounds to the hundred francs, and you may get a trifle more if the exchange is favourable), that is just fourteen pounds—first-class to Paris, and second on to Contrexéville.'

'Ah !' he returned with a sigh ; 'that is possible, though it is desperate costly ; and as much more to come back. Twenty-eight pounds sterling—for how long ?—less than a month.'

'Perhaps, my dear Mr Craig, you might feel equal to prolong your ramble, and go on into Germany ; a little change of scene and—and diet might have a most beneficial effect.'

'Perhaps ; if *she* will come wi' me,' pointing to Mona.

'Of course she will. She might as well, —breaking up now, she cannot expect to get any more pupils this year.'

'Oh, indeed !' returned Uncle Sandy, in an aggrieved tone.

'Mona, my love ! there is a letter for

you downstairs. You had better go and see if it needs an answer.' Mona obeyed. 'I am sure you'll forgive me, my dear Mr Craig, if from my deep interest in all that concerns Mona, I venture to take a liberty. As the dear girl is going to act a daughter's part to you, I hope you will see the necessity of being a parent to her; and as you have never known much of young ladies and their requirements, you must suffer me to suggest that a nice little allowance—to enable her to dress as becomes your adopted daughter,—would be—'

'Naw!' broke in Uncle Sandy, in his strongest accent; 'I will not suffer it! Wha said I was going to adopt her? You have just taken a varra great liberty.'

'I am sorry to have offended,' said Madame Debrisay stiffly; 'but I considered it my duty to one I look upon as a child of my own—'—['Eh! she has an adopted mother as weel's a father!' he put in with a sneer],—'to inform you that the very small sum I hold for her,' continued Madame Debrisay, not heeding the interruption, 'would be soon exhausted were

she to draw on it for her personal expenses ; and I think you ought—'

'I am much obliged to you, madame, for telling me what I ought to do,' interrupted Uncle Sandy again, in high wrath. 'I never did need any instruction as to my duty in this life. I shall do what I think right by my niece, and you needn't interfere. If I thought she had any act or part in this attempt to extort money from me, I'd—I'd disown her.'

'Extort money, indeed!' cried Madame Debrisay. 'Those are words you have no right to address to me. Extort money! I am more apt to give money away than to extort it. When your niece was deserted by everyone because she would not sell herself in a mercenary marriage, did I count what it would cost me to keep her if I took her in? No, I was proud and happy—'

'Eh? a mercenary marriage!' broke in Uncle Sandy, his indignation merged in sharp curiosity. 'Wha—what do ye mean? Did she refuse a man?'

'Yes; a rich man, and a real gentleman,' returned Madame Debrisay, recover-

ing herself, and perceiving she had made a false move.

‘Then she’s fa’en in love wi’ another lad?’

‘Ah!’ cried Madame Debrisay, as if a new light had broken in upon her; ‘that must be it. My dear sir, you have the furthest sight of us all, and’—laughing good-humouredly—‘I am really ashamed of my own folly, talking to a man of your stamp about what you ought or ought not to do; you really must excuse me. I have not often met a man of your intelligence and penetration, so you must forgive my stupidity, and give me plenary absolution.’

‘I bear no malice,’ said Uncle Sandy, with dignity, ‘and I know it is hard for a woman to keep her tongue quiet. Least said, soonest mended. Let’s say nae mair about it. It had best not come to Mona’s ears.’

‘Trust me, I shall not breathe a syllable to her; and I will go and prepare your cocoa. Let me shake hands with you, my dear sir.’

Having done so, Madame Debrisay left

the room, murmuring to herself as she descended the stairs, — ‘Stingy, cross-grained, cantankerous old miser! He thinks he can set the Thames on fire.’

While Uncle Sandy, reclining a conqueror in his easy-chair, musing on the altercation, ‘A hasty, stormy woman,’ was his mental verdict, ‘but no devoid o’ sense.’





CHAPTER V.

CONTREXÉVILLE.

FINALLY all things were arranged, or arranged themselves; and one fine morning in June, Uncle Sandy (to whom it was no difficulty to get up 'in the middle of the night,' as Madame Debrisay said) and Mona were ready at an early hour—packed and breakfasted—to start by the morning train for Dover, *en route* to Paris.

'I do not know how I'll live without you,' said Madame Debrisay, embracing Mona, with fast-flowing tears. 'I was all right before you came, but now I know what it is to have you by me! It will be awfully lonesome when you are gone.'

'And how I shall miss you, dearest

Deb! You know I am half afraid of the task I have undertaken! It is a serious matter to be bear leader to Uncle Sandy.'

'That it is! But you will do well! Above all, hold your own. If you give in, he'll be sure to trample on you. And you will write to me every week?'

'I will, dear Deb; and you must answer. Good-bye! God bless you!'

'We'll just miss our train,' called Uncle Sandy from the cab.

The journey across the Channel and to the capital of fair France is now a twice-told—nay, a thrice-told, tale, familiar to every 'Arry and his 'Arriet.' Nevertheless it was fraught with excitement and delight to Uncle Sandy's inexperience. The fair hop fields of Kent, the white cliffs and blue glittering waters of the Channel at Dover, the Admiralty Pier, the castle-crowned heights, the lowering of somebody's carriage on to the deck, all afforded him matter for wonder and admiration.

Hitherto his travels were limited to Glasgow, Ardclachan (where the factory was situated in which he had risen to be foreman and manager), and Strathairlie.

When he came to London he had taken the night train, so every step of this new way was a novelty.

But the marvel of marvels was to land at Calais, and not understand a word spoken by the chattering crowd around him. Then, indeed, he clung to his niece's arm, and was abjectly civil to the polite interpreter who travelled with the train.

Mona, who had been somewhat nervous about conveying her invalid uncle such a distance, was surprised and relieved to find how change of scene drew him out of himself, and how many of his infirmities vanished, because he had not time to think of them.

She was glad, however, to get him safe to the hotel recommended by Madame Debrisay, which was half-way between the Gare du Nord and the Gar de l'Est—a thoroughly French house, where they found a German waiter who spoke English, but who had some difficulty in understanding Uncle Sandy's.

The old man was quite exhausted, and went to bed as soon as he had partaken of some food.

‘ You’ll pit your purse under your pillow, dearie,’ he said tremuously, ‘ and lock your door ; and here, my lambie, here are ten sovereigns. They are for your ain self ; and when you want more, you tell me. I dinna wish you to want for onything, only I would nae be talked out o’ siller. Eh ! it’s wonderful to hear till ye talking to these outlandish folk in their ain tongue. I wish I had had mair learnin’ in my youth.’

‘ Thank you, dear uncle, you are very good ! Now you must get to sleep. I have lit a night-light, and my room is next yours. If you will knock at the door, I will come to you.’

How strange it was to be in Paris once more, after four or five years’ absence ; and under what different circumstances !

Her grandmother, though most careful of money, understood what things cost, and what must be paid for. Moreover, she had the old-fashioned idea that girls could not be trusted. That they were pretty, helpless children, to be penned up, and kept from soiling their delicate fingers, or brushing off the pearly freshness of infantile ignorance, till a purchaser (*i.e.*, a husband)

was found for such precious wares. Therefore Mona's reminiscences of former travel presented a dead level of carefully-guarded and complete security, to which her present somewhat troublesome responsibility formed by comparison a proud preferment. The past had its pleasures as well as its pains, but both had left a sting behind. This, however, she was thankful to perceive, was losing its venom.

She could think of Lisle without emotion, and look back with the half-pitying, half-amused indulgence of an elder for the weakness of a junior to the strong attraction he had possessed for her. At least she had succeeded in concealing this from him, and now they would probably never meet again.

With these ideas floating in her brain she fell asleep, having given all requisite orders for their early start the following morning.

The journey was tedious, for the country was somewhat uninteresting; and Mona, being a stranger in that part of the land, could not supply information as she had done during the previous day. Uncle Sandy bemoaned the heat, the cost, the weariness

of travel; and his niece was truly glad when they reached a shabby little station in a rather flat but prettily-wooded country, and everyone got out.

A brisk struggle for the passengers occurred between the *conducteurs* of the various omnibuses, *char à bancs*, etc., which awaited the arrival of the train; and outside the station yard was a gathering of the peasant inhabitants of the village—the men in blouses, the women in nice white caps and aprons—staring at the strangers deposited at their gates, loudly discussing their appearance in shrill voices and with many gestures.

‘It ought to be a wonderfu’ cure to come this weary long road for it!’ groaned Uncle Sandy, as he descended from their conveyance when it stopped before the entrance of the *etablissement*.

Then came the business of finding rooms and arranging terms. This was simplified by a letter of introduction obtained by Madame Debrisay from a mutual friend, to M. le Directeur, who speedily came to them, and, to Mr Craig’s infinite joy, proved to be an excellent English scholar. Mona

thought her uncle would have embraced him when he addressed them in their native tongue.

Who that has lately visited Contrexéville does not know M. le Directeur, and remember him with pleasure? Watchful to contribute by care and judicious regulations to the welfare of the humblest visitor, considerate and fatherly in his thought for the weak and suffering, almost ubiquitous in his ceaseless vigilance — his gracious manners and kindly, strongly-marked face make him ever welcome to old and young!

The sight of the weakly, querulous old man, who seemed far more helpless than he really was, under the care of such a delicate, distinguished-looking young creature as Mona, appealed to the abundant chivalry of his nature, and from the moment of their meeting him, all difficulties vanished.

The next day saw Uncle Sandy duly inaugurated into the system of water-drinking, douches, and massage.

Mona found her duties as adopted daughter by no means light. At six o'clock she was expected to be ready to give her arm

to her uncle, and assist his progress to the spring ; to walk with him to and fro between the tumblers of water ; to translate his grumblings to the bath attendant and the ' masseur ;' to explain the impossibility of his eating the ornamental savoury dishes at the *table d'hôte* ;—in short, though M. le Directeur and the Doctor both spoke and understood English, there were a hundred-and-one trifles which required Mona's intervention every day in the week, besides her ordinary task of reading aloud the leaders in the *Scotsman*, which was forwarded to him regularly, and writing the few letters he needed to despatch. For part of Uncle Sandy's illusions about his health consisted of a belief that a slight tremulousness in his hands was an indication of spine disease, creeping paralysis, and various other maladies, according as they came to his knowledge.

The few years which had intervened between his retirement from business, on the death of the last original partner, and its passing into other hands, were passed by him in the seclusion of his Highland home, and in the sedulous study of his own health.

This had been impaired by a sharp attack of rheumatic fever, not long before he had taken up his abode at Craigdarroch. His mental condition can therefore be imagined, and probably it was only his meeting with Mona, and her subsequent companionship, which saved him from becoming a confirmed hypochondriac. From this he had so far been preserved by a little quiet and eminently successful speculation, by which he had largely increased the fortune derived from his own savings, and the large bequest of the head of the firm, an old bachelor, who fondly hoped that Sandy Craig would remain in the house, and carry on the business according to the old tradition of the establishment. But the advent of new men was too much for the elderly junior partner's faith. He could not, he said, trust his 'sair-earned siller to the whims of young men,' so he took his capital out of the concern; again, at the first check in his cautious speculations, he at once held his hand, and was content to let his 'siller' lie comparatively fallow, thereby depriving his dull life of its one spark of excitement.

Contrexéville is a pleasant place. It boasts two tennis lawns, where chance English and American visitors sometimes lent animation to the scene ; also, an archery ground, a shooting-gallery, a theatre, and a *salle de danse*.

Occasionally Mona enjoyed a game of tennis, as an English family, consisting of father, mother, two daughters, and a hobble-dehoy son, made very friendly advances, and frequently invited her to join them when they played.

The father, a stout, red-faced sufferer from gout, made friends with Uncle Sandy, and many were their arguments, as Mr Clapton was a strong Conservative, and his wife a dame of the Primrose League, while Mr Craig was an advanced Liberal, not to say a Radical of the most virulent description. This little excitement largely helped the cure, and Uncle Sandy was reluctantly obliged to admit that he felt considerably better.

‘How well mademoiselle your niece plays the tennis!’ said M. le Directeur, taking his seat on the bench where Uncle Sandy and Mr Clapton had already placed

themselves under the shade of some trees, and in view of the tennis courts. 'Do not derange yourselves, gentlemen, I pray you!' he continued. 'I like to look at Mees Craig, her attitudes are so graceful. She seems like the spirit of the game, yet she is so quiet and *posée*, and gentle at other times. Truly she is a young girl to be proud of, and I make you my compliments.' He bowed low to her uncle, while Mr Clapton endorsed the eulogium by a short emphatic 'Deuced fine girl, 'pon my soul!'

The heart of Alexander Craig swelled within him. Perhaps of all the ingredients in his character, pride contributed the largest share, and that pride had been sorely let and hindered all the years of his youth. He would have been completely soured by this constant repression, but his devout belief in himself. To find that anyone belonging to him should call forth the praise and admiration of the beholders, was a source of delicious gratification, and Mona's merits assumed larger proportions in his eyes as M. le Directeur spoke.

‘Eh, she’s a good lassie! She is my puir brother’s only child, and I look on her as my ain bairn, as she’ll find when I am released from the sufferings of this mortal life.’

There was a constant struggle in Mr Craig’s mind, between a desire to hide the fact that he was in easy circumstances, and a wish to command the respect due to a man whose pockets were well lined.

‘And a very nice daughter she must be,’ cried Mr Clapton, accepting a cigar from M. le Directeur.

‘The most charming of companions is a dear daughter,’ said the latter; ‘the constant presence of a sweet young girl sheds a light of tender purity on her father’s life, such as nothing else produces.’

He continued gazing at Mona with a soft, pensive smile.

‘Oh! Ah! Yes! But they manage to run up deuced long bills,’ returned the Englishman.

‘That’s what should never be permitted!’ exclaimed Uncle Sandy energetically. ‘No woman that ever lived could talk me into paying a bill! I would na mind giving

her siller—cash' (correcting himself) 'to buy her bit duds beforehand; but bills—na, na!'

'Monsieur has much force of character,' said M. le Directeur, smiling. 'But he would find it very difficult to say no to so charming a young lady as your niece.'

'Should I?' cried Uncle Sandy, tossing up his chin; 'let her try me, and she'll soon find out if I can or not.'

'I expect some very distinguished compatriots of yours,' resumed M. le Directeur; 'the Lord Fitzallan and a companion arrive to-morrow, and Sir William 'Arty—I think he has been Lord Mayor, a man of high position—he and miladi, his wife, they come to-morrow. It is well that the tennis lawn looks bright; you energetic English, you love games to the last.'

'Fitzallan,' repeated Mr Craig. 'I know!—he is my tenant; he has had my house in the Highlands for a considerable time.'

'Indeed!' said both hearers.

And from that moment Uncle Sandy was raised to the rank of a millionaire.

The set was now over, and Mona's side had lost, in spite of her good play. The

hour for Uncle Sandy's afternoon walk in the adjoining wood was at hand, so he beckoned her to him, not a little delighted to exercise overtly a father's rights over an elegant-looking girl, who bore the unmistakable stamp of 'the Upper Ten'—a class against which he raved theoretically.

'Ah!' said he, as he toddled (a common expression, but extremely expressive of Uncle Sandy's peculiar gait) along, with the help of a stick and an umbrella, beside his niece; 'the Director has been telling me there are some grand folk coming to-morrow; then you'll see how little time and attention he'll be able to spare for such as you and me!'

'I have been greatly mistaken in M. Delorme, if their presence makes any difference to him,' she returned.

'Weel, you'll see; young things like you think everyone is an angel that speaks a kind word. When my Leddy Mayoress arrives, the roses and posies he has been handing you so politely every morning will all go to her leddyship!'

'Well, perhaps so! I don't suppose I have more penetration than my neigh-

bours ; but I am quite fond of M. le Directeur, so I hope he will not allow any ladyship, however grand, to cut me out ! I shall be deeply wounded if he does !’

‘ You are a foolish bairn ! Now, Mona, I don’t like any poor, meeserable creature—just like ourselves—that’s a’ puffed up wi’ a handle to her name ; I don’t like her to show finer feathers than my brother’s daughter, so if you want a braw new gownd, you get it, my bairn ; only tell me the cost beforehand !’

‘ You are very good and generous, uncle ; but I do not need anything. I had some of my last year’s dresses done up before we came away ; and I actually do not fear comparison, even with so exalted a personage as a Lady Mayoress,’ said Mona, laughing.

‘ That’s a’ richt ; it’s weel to have a proper spirit. We are tauld that we must not allow pride to master our hearts ; but proper pride is no’ included ; and I have always held myself to be as good as ony ither mon.’

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The following day, shortly before the hour for *table d'hôte*, the stagnant waters of life at Contrexéville were stirred by the arrival of my Lord Fitzallan, his valet, his friend—a young man—and his valet; a pile of luggage, including gun-cases, fishing-rods, a couple of dogs, and endless impedimenta of various kinds. Every waiter in the place appeared absorbed in the bustle created by this important arrival; and the visitors, as they assembled for dinner, talked of nothing else. The great men had signified their gracious intention of dining with the general public, and their places were being busily got ready, champagne bottles put into coolers, and extra dainties for dessert being placed at their end of the table.

‘It’s just a humeeliating spectacle,’ said Uncle Sandy, taking his seat and unfolding his napkin, while his very nose seemed to curl up with contemptuous disapprobation, ‘to see such a like set out over twa laddies that would be better earning their crust.’

‘I fancy, from what I have heard, Lord Fitzallan is by no means young.’

‘Why? What do ye ken about him?’

Before she could reply, the door opened, and the new guests, conducted by the manager of the hotel, entered. The first was a tall, thin, very thin man, of forty-five or fifty, whose colouring was extremely neutral. His hair was of light hay colour; his moustaches a shade or two darker; his complexion a pale drab; his eyes a faded blue; a very long pointed nose; and a rather receding chin, did not convey an idea of mental strength; nor did his sloping shoulders, spidery legs, and long neck suggest physical power. He was clothed with extreme neatness and beautiful freshness in grey—stockings and all; for as he wore knickerbockers, these were seen. A deep red silk neckerchief, drawn through an antique ring, the ends hanging loose, was the only bit of colour about him. He was smiling blandly at something the host was saying, and his expression was kindly enough, but Mona scarcely took in these details, so surprised was she to see that his friend who followed him was Bertie Everard.

That gentleman's keen eyes detected her instantly, but with his usual immobility, he merely raised his eyebrows, smiled faintly, and bowed as if he had quite expected to meet his young kinswoman at the *table d'hôte*. Mona was vexed at herself for colouring as she felt she did when she returned his bow, smiling at the same time with irrepressible amusement. The idea of an encounter between Uncle Sandy and Bertie Everard seemed infinitely comic.

'Wha's that?' asked the former indignantly.

'He is a sort of cousin of mine, or rather of my poor grandmother. I used to stay at his mother's house. She was very kind to me.'

'Ay, till you began to earn your own living, those are aye worthless folk. Stop the waiter, will ye? I cannot eat this fish; it has seen a deal of the world since it left the watter.'

The offending fish removed, Uncle Sandy 'glowered,' as he would have said himself, at the newcomers, till it was replaced by a *salmis* of pigeons.

‘Just bones and gravy,’ he observed.

Lord Fitzallan sent away his plate untouched more than once. He spoke little, but he looked about with considerable interest, fixing a glass in his eye, which frequently fell out and gave him a good deal of occupation.

Everard paid steady attention to his dinner. Once when about to drink a glass of champagne, he raised the glass with a nod and smile as if he drank it to Mona’s health. This seemed to attract his companion’s notice, he immediately refixed his glass, and directed his glances to her with little intermission during the remainder of the repast, evidently asking Everard numerous questions, to which he gave the shortest possible replies.

At length it was all over. Uncle Sandy, leaning heavily on the table and his walking-stick, got on his feet, and taking his niece’s arm, moved towards the door, intending to follow his usual habit of retiring to a particular seat in what was termed the Park, where Mona read to him from the newspaper, which generally reached them in the afternoon. Everard

also left his seat and came across to intercept their retreat.

'Well, fair cousin, is it gout or rheumatism, or any other fleshly ill, that brings you to this lively health resort? I suspect you are here on false pretences.'

He shook hands with her as he spoke.

'No, I am not here on my account. I have come with my uncle, Mr Craig. This is Mr Everard, uncle, of whom I have spoken to you.'

'Glad to see you, sir,' said Uncle Sandy, with such an amiable grin that Mona was surprised. She thought he would have been annoyed at having the young aristocrat forced upon him. Everard made a slight bow, and gave him a cool, scrutinising glance.

'So you have turned nurse, Mona?—a noble calling, eh?'

'It is that, sir,' said Uncle Sandy seriously, 'and she makes a kind, considerate one, I can assure you!'

'Won't you present me, Bertie?' said Lord Fitzallan, who had paused beside him.

'Oh! certainly. Let me present my

cousin Fitzallan, to my cousin Miss—
What do you call yourself now, Mona?’

‘Miss Craig,’ she returned quietly, though her cheeks flushed.

‘Lord Fitzallan bowed twice, once to the lady, once to the crabbed-looking little Scotsman.

‘Ah! Miss Craig, don’t you think we might contrive a cousinship out of the double relationship,’ he said, in a soft but weakly voice, and with what he intended for a fascinating simper.

‘I am afraid not. The only real relation I have is my uncle.’

‘What a rude speech, Mona. Do you repudiate me?’

‘Oh no! I take you for what you are worth.’

‘Been long here?’ asked Lord Fitzallan.

‘About a week,’ returned Mona.

‘And is there positively nothing to do here?’ said Everard.

‘Yes! a good deal. There is bathing, and water-drinking, and massage, and tennis, archery, lotteries, and a theatre.’

‘That sounds a good deal, but it’s a beggarly entertainment after all.’

‘Tennis?’ put in Lord Fitzallan. ‘It is amusing for a time. I think I have my racquet with me. Do you play, Miss—Craig?’

‘I do.’

‘Nonsense, Fitz,’ broke in Everard, ‘you must not think of playing. You have come here for the cure, and I have come to see you safe through it. We must bear the boredom as best we can.’

‘There is a tyrant, ain’t he, Miss Craig? Well, are you going out for a stroll? Allow us to join you.’

‘I find a quiet read after meals is an uncommon help to digestion,’ said Uncle Sandy, clutching Mona’s arm; ‘and there’s a varra pleasant seat out yonder, whar my niece justs reads to me a bittie of an evening; and if we don’t mak haste, there’s a little black-browed Frenchman that will be before us. You and my lord here can have a look at the *Scotsman* if you like—maybe ye don’t see it every day; there’s room for us a’ on the same bench.’

Everard lifted his eyebrows.

‘Oh! I have some letters to write. How is your friend and partner the music

mistress, Mona ? It was the funniest idea your running away from my mother to her.'

'Run away ? Did you really run away ? What an enterprising young lady,' said Lord Fitzallan, as the quartette strolled along towards the seat indicated.

'Dinna hear till him,' cried Uncle Sandy, a good deal disturbed. 'My niece is not the sort o' young leddy to do sic an unmannerly imprudence, she is just a lassie wi' a proper sense of independence.'

'Proper sense of independence,' repeated Everard ; 'I fancy you will think it improper, when she runs away from *you* ?'

'Eh ! but she'll no do that ! She can have a good home with me if she chooses, as you know, my lord !'

'Who—me ?' exclaimed Lord Fitzallan. 'My good sir, what do I know about it ?'

'Then you ought, considering you have rented my hoose for near on two years ! Don't ye mind Craigdarroch ?'

'Craigdarroch ! by Jove ! are you Craig of Craigdarroch ? I had not the faintest idea I should meet my landlord in this remote region. And you, Miss Craig, are

you not some sort of feudal chief? I am quite ready to swear fealty to you!’

‘Naw!’ exclaimed Uncle Sandy, with the strongest negation. ‘It’s mine, so lang as I have breath! but it’s nae a bad hame?’

‘Bad! it is a lovely, picturesque spot, for a month or two in the shooting season; but of course it is impossible in winter, and appallingly dull in spring. Miss Craig could not live there.’

‘Weel she can live oot o’ it if she likes, but not wi’ me. I am just wearin’ to get back, and I have tauld my agent not to accept ony offer frae you for further occupancy.’

‘That is too bad, Mr Craig. I should like to have a third season there! It is a snug little box, and as I do not like large parties, it just suits me.’

‘Sma’, repeated Mr Craig indignantly. ‘There are six large sleeping-rooms, forbye twa ithers, and servants’ accommodation, a drawing-room, and a dining-room, a library, and my museum, and cellars, etc.’

‘Oh yes, a capital house,’ said Lord Fitz-allan, with an indulgent smile to Mona, as

if taking her into his confidence, 'only not exactly large. Miss Craig will be charmed with the views, etc. That is, if she does not already know it.'

'What a funny notion that Craigdarroch should belong to your uncle, Mona,' said Everard.

'And why shouldn't it?' asked Uncle Sandy testily. 'Why shouldn't Mona's uncle buy what he likes with the money he worked so hard to mak'?'

'I am sure I have no objection. Only I wish you would let Fitzallan have the place for another year. I can only be with him for ten days this season, and the shooting about there is first-rate.'

'I am afraid you are a self-seeker, young mon,' said Uncle Sandy solemnly.

'Yes, of course I am. So are you; so are we all.'

'I have always tried to do my duty,' returned Uncle Sandy, startled by this attack.

'I daresay. It is much the best plan; it does one no harm if you manage properly, and it pays in the end.'

'Yet,' said Mona quietly, 'I can imagine

your performance of duty not being specially profitable to your employer.'

'What right have you to say that?' cried Everard, a little nettled. 'It is appalling to think what your tongue will be when you are an old woman, considering what it is at present.'

'Miss— Miss—' began Lord Fitzallan, whose memory was not retentive. 'Your charming cousin will never be old.'

'Well, I have letters to write, so come along, Fitz. We had better get to bed early. It seems one must get up in the middle of the night here.'

'Oh, yes, go to bed by all means. I shall come in presently. It is pleasant and fresh here. I shall stay and have a cigarette, if you will allow me,' bowing to Mona.

'Nonsense. You'll catch your death of cold.'

'Tell Achille to bring me a scarf then,' returned his lordship, drawing out his fusees. 'I'll join you presently.'

'Good-evening,' said Everard, rather abruptly, and he went off towards the *etablissement*.

There was a moment's pause, Uncle Sandy looking after the retreating figure with a somewhat puzzled expression.

'Craig!' suddenly exclaimed Lord Fitzallan. 'I have it; same name as your uncle's. Eh?'

'Exactly,' said Mona, smiling.

'You'll excuse me. I never could remember about names. And how is it you are Everard's cousin, and—and this gentleman's niece?'

'I do not know how I am Mr Everard's cousin, but my father was Mr Craig's brother.'

'Ah, yes, of course,' with an air of profound comprehension. 'You must be his niece. Glad you gave Bertie a set down; he is an awfully conceited fellow; very good, and clever, and all that, but I must say conceited. You'll not mention I said so?'

'Of course I will not.'

'It is the fault of young people to be that self-opinionated that they will no hear reason,' said Uncle Sandy.

'Yes, that's a—really the fact,' cried Lord Fitzallan, as if struck by a newly-discovered truth.

‘But,’ continued Uncle Sandy, ‘that is no excuse for your speaking so harsh to him, Mona. It’s no becoming in a young lassie to rebuke a man wha nae doot knows far mair than herself.’

‘I do not admit it, uncle. He may have one kind of knowledge, and I have another, but I do not feel that Bertie is my superior.’

‘Superior. No, no, no! No one is superior to a charming woman!’ cried Lord Fitzallan, with an admiring simper.

‘If you please, my lord,’ said his French valet, approaching with a large soft white scarf in his hand. ‘Mistare Everard would be glad to speak to your lordship before he closes his letter to my Lord Lynebridge.’

‘Oh, certainly. Must go. Horrid bore. Hope to see you to-morrow. Good-evening. You must let me have your charming house for another year, Mr Craig, really now.’

He bowed and departed, carefully folding the scarf round his throat, and followed by his valet.

‘Eh, but the foolishness of it a’!’ exclaimed Uncle Sandy. ‘My lord and your lordship. A wiselike leader o’ men yon

wad mak, when he daurna refuse to obey the message that bit o' a whipper-snapper sent him by his ain flunky! Not but I think the puir lord-body the best o' the twa. He's kind and civil; but your cousin thinks he can snuff out sun an' moon wi' his thumb and forefinger. You are an honest girlye, Mona. You stuck to your uncle in face o' these fine gentlemen, but don't you be too sharp. Noo, read me a bit o' the parliamentary news before I gang awa' to my bed.'





CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

TONA did not find life at Contrexéville by any means exhilarating. Her time was never her own; it required some management even to make a spare half-hour for her weekly letter to Madame Debrisay, whose epistles described her loneliness very eloquently. Uncle Sandy seemed to have taken complete possession of his niece, and was indeed more amiable and affectionate towards her than he had ever been before to any creature.

One reason, probably the strongest for the trust she inspired in him, was her superiority in manner and air, coupled with her complete independence, which

yet did not prevent her from treating him with gentle respect. The quiet composure of Mona's exterior hid much fire and sensitiveness,—a depth of nature and power of love, which the 'back-bone' inherited with her Scotch blood at once intensified, and preserved from degenerating into weakness.

The old man's peculiarities and contradictions, though often provoking, were, in a certain degree, interesting ; yet Mona pined for the sympathetic companionship of Madame Debrisay,—the sense of rest and comfort in their very homely home. She had ripened rapidly in character and feeling from the time her short spell of brilliancy and pleasure had been so rudely ended. The reality underlying the surface of social life had revealed itself more and more, and she was fast learning how few and simple are the ingredients of true happiness.

At the first moment of recognition, she was displeased to find that Everard and Lord Fitzallan were to be their 'companions of the Bath.' She feared that the former would irritate her uncle, besides which he was a formidable person to encounter,

and she had always to do a little reasoning with herself, before she could face him unflinchingly—a course which always brought its own reward, and in which the first step only, ever cost anything.

It was very amusing to her to see how profoundly gratified that stern republican Uncle Sandy was by being associated as a family connection with the great *grandeeds* of the season. Sneer as he might at ‘yon puir feckless bit of a lord’ in his absence, he was always placidly content to hobble along with Mona between himself and the elderly young man in public places.

To Everard he was more deferential. That gentleman’s good-humoured, unflinching indifference to the feelings of his fellow-creatures filled him with awe. There was no knowing what he might say next, while the fearlessness with which Mona crossed rapiers with him excited his admiration. Yet Everard was always ready to talk with her, and even tried, with the obstinacy for which he was remarkable, to get her away from her uncle to walk with him.

This degree of attention woke Uncle Sandy’s suspicions, for, as is not unusual

in Scotchmen, he was disposed to attribute all such indications to *the* master passion of humanity.

‘Tell me, noo,’ he said one exceedingly warm afternoon, as they sat in his room—the coolest spot in the establishment, where Mona had been reading aloud till her throat ached, and he dozed at intervals, ‘tell me, was it because o’ one cousin ye refused the other?’

‘How do you mean, Uncle Sandy?’

‘Eh, you understan’ well enough. Is it because ye luv young Everard you refused Kenneth?’

‘Love Bertie Everard! Do you think any human being loves him, except, perhaps, his mother?’

‘How can I ken? He is a braw, outspoken callant.’

‘He is brutally indifferent to everyone’s feelings. Were I obliged to marry either, I should certainly prefer Kenneth.’

‘Then what for should you refuse him?’

‘Because I do not intend to marry him.’

‘Do you know that it will go hard wi’ me before I ever consent to your marrying ony ither mon?’

‘Well, I shall not trouble you, uncle.’

‘Why? Have you sworn against matrimony?’

‘No; but I am not strongly inclined for marriage.’

‘That’s wrang. Every woman is the better of a ruler.’

‘I am conceited enough to be content with my own guidance. Do not think me unkind or obstinate, Uncle Sandy, but I never shall be able to marry Kenneth.’

‘Then, Mona, I am sair at heart to say it, but I’ll no count you as my daughter.’

‘Oh yes, you will, uncle! You could not do without me!’

‘Not weel. Yet I’d try, if you set your face against doing what I want you to do. Has Kenneth written to ye?’

‘No; then I have not written to him.’

‘Well do, like a good lassie.’

‘Oh yes, uncle, I will write to him.’

‘Have you been to the theatre?’ asked Lord Fitzallan, in the evening, as they sat together in the park.

‘No,’ she replied.

‘It’s not bad—not bad at all,’ said Everard. ‘There’s a woman who sings

very well, and they all have the national dramatic gift.'

'Come with us to-morrow, Miss Craig,' cried Lord Fitzallan. 'They give "Boccaccio," and it is quite worth going to see.'

'I dinna approve play-acting,' said Uncle Sandy. 'It's just a sinfu' travestie on human nature; and I am told these French plays are no' fit for a decent-like woman to sit and look at.'

'Some of them are rather strong; but this is really quite correct. Come yourself, Mr Craig.'

'Wha? Me? Na, na. I have never been in a playhouse, and I never will be.'

'I am very fond of the theatre,' said Mona; 'but, as my uncle does not approve, I will not go.'

'I dinna forbid you. You are free to go; only I hope you would na tak' a young lassie to see what isn't fit for her eyes.'

'Oh, certainly not!' cried both gentlemen, in chorus.

'Then to-morrow evening,' resumed Lord Fitzallan; 'I'll go and see about places. By the way, Miss Craig, let us

have a game at tennis to-morrow. I am feeling all the stronger for my treatment, and feel I can do wonders. There is that nice little roly-poly English girl—I forget her name—and Bertie.’

‘No, no! No tennis for me. How can you exhaust yourself with such nonsense?’

‘It is an admirable game, and I am getting quite scientific about it—ain’t I, Miss Craig? Come along; they have some very pretty stones peculiar to the country, I believe, at that rubbish shop just outside the park.’

‘Na! I will not let my niece throw away any siller on such rubbish.’

‘Well, may she not come and give me the benefit of her taste?’

‘Na! Why should you waste your siller either?’

‘I am sure you haven’t too much to spare!’ cried Everard.

‘That’s my affair,’ rejoined Lord Fitzallan. ‘So I shall go by myself.’

Here the elder Mr Clapton—Upper Clapton, as Everard called him, Uncle Sandy’s friendly adversary—joined them.

‘Come, have a stroll with me, Mona,’ said Everard. ‘I had a letter from Evelyn to-day, and I will tell you all about it.’

‘Very well. Uncle, we are going a little way, and will be back soon.’

They walked along a path leading into the woods in silence for a few minutes. At length Mona asked,—

‘And what does Evelyn say?’

‘Oh, nothing particular. She is still in a fool’s paradise. They are not going to Strathairlie, because they want to show off the son and heir in Cumberland. They are to have a large party, and want me to go; but that is impossible. I must look after Fitzallan; and that brings me to what I want to say. Don’t run away with the notion you can marry Fitzallan.’

‘Marry Fitzallan!’ repeated Mona, amazed. ‘What an extraordinary idea!’

‘Well, he is always running after you, and talking bosh about you, and giving you flowers; but it’s not to be done!’

‘Why, Bertie, you must be out of your mind.’

‘Not at all. Don’t fly off at a tangent.

Of course it is perfectly natural you should try to get a good settlement. It would be a famous match ; but I can't allow it.'

Mona paused, leant against a tree, and laughed heartily.

'If I could keep my countenance, I should be angry with you, Bertie! The determination people seem to have that I shall marry someone or other is absurd.'

'But I am determined you shall not marry Fitzallan. Don't you know that, after him, my father is heir to the earldom, and after him your humble servant. Now Fitz was born an idiot, and hasn't improved his brains by hard drinking. His father, Lord Lynebridge, won't give him a penny. Some one has to go about with him, or he would destroy himself in a few months. He proposes for every woman he meets. We had an awful row last April with a girl at a luncheon-bar at Willesden or Ealing or some such place. He is a harmless creature, but his father will not give him a sous, and he does not want him to marry. It would be a splendid match for *you*, but you see he has been

so queer, I believe we could break it, so it will not do to attempt such a hazard.'

'Listen, Bertie. What have you ever seen in me to induce you to think of warning me in this insulting manner? Marry Lord Fitzallan! Why, I would almost rather,' she paused and looked at her kinsman from head to foot, 'I would almost rather marry *you*.'

'Oh! you would, would you? By Jove! you are the coolest hand I ever met! I don't think there's a possibility of turning your flank, and I can't understand you. Are you really indifferent to everyone? Don't you care for wealth or luxury or— You have an uncommon fine pair of eyes, Mona, and there's heaps of devilry sleeping in them.'

'No; you cannot understand *me*, but I understand you, Bertie, and my knowledge of your character does not improve my opinion of human nature; yet I do not believe you are quite as utterly selfish as you affect to be.'

'Affect! I never affect anything. *You* put me out of patience with your affectation of disinterestedness, and yet how incon-

sistent you are. You fly out at me for suspecting you of the very natural, and from your point of view, laudable project of marrying a man of rank, while you hang on like grim death to a low-born, low-bred, rich old buffer, hoping to get his money.'

'If my uncle is low-born, so am I. But I shall not waste my breath explaining anything. I do not care if you understand me or not, Bertie. I have not the slightest value for your opinion. I should dislike you, but for your relationship to Lady Mary and the girls, and the sort of amusement your oddities afford. You are a curious creature! I wonder if you were changed in your babyhood, you are so unlike the rest of your people.'

'Well you speak plain enough.'

'Yes. I will always speak to you in your own style. What are you—any of you, to me? I want nothing from you. I can supply my own wants, and I have not the smallest ambition to belong to you in any way. I never seek you, and if you ceased to recognise me it would not cause me the smallest annoyance.'

'Oh! but I like to talk to you. If I

ever could make such an ass of myself as to fall in love, I should fall in love with you.'

Mona laughed merrily at this avowal.

'Come let us go back,' she said. 'You are by no means agreeable. I really regret not having a sympathetic companion this beautiful evening.'

'Ay, I daresay you would prefer Lisle now?'

'Yes; a good deal more. He knew how to mask his selfishness, which is all one expects from an everyday acquaintance.'

'I think, Mona, I shall cut you in future.'

'As you please. I am quite ready to second your efforts. Here is young Mr Clapton, he will walk back with me.—Well, Mr Clapton, I think we are going to have another cloudless day to-morrow. Is your sister inclined to make a set at tennis. I think my uncle will not want me in the afternoon.'

And the hobbledehoy, well pleased to be in attendance on Miss Craig, who was now considered 'the glass of fashion, and the mould of form,' walked back to the park on one side of Mona, while Everard sulked at the other.

The following day was dry and fine, and the projected tennis match came off very successfully. Mona, and Miss Clapton, her brother, and an Anglo-maniac French count, short, stout, and extremely puffy.

Lord Fitzallan appeared in an elegant suit of flannels, and picturesque cap ; but he served so badly, and so constantly missed his balls, that he soon declared the heat was too much for him, and he subsided on a bench beside Uncle Sandy, who had so improved in health and spirits that he even confessed to a certain interest in the game, and confided to Lord Fitzallan his conviction that, had he not been such a 'frail bôdy' he could have played 'fine.'

Mona observed that her uncle and Lord Fitzallan gradually got into evidently deep conversation ; but she did not take much notice of them, as the game was interesting and the Frenchman played better than usual.

Mr Craig was rather silent all the evening, and retired to rest even earlier than usual ; but he was more gracious than his wont, and there was a tone of veiled superiority in his voice when he spoke to Everard.

‘Mona,’ said her uncle, when, after the matutinal water-drinking and douche, etc., etc., next day, she went at noon to administer a biscuit and a glass of wine,—‘I have something to say to you, my dearie. Sit ye doon.’

‘Very well, uncle,’ taking her place beside him on the sofa. ‘What is it?’

‘A varra serious matter, which I hope you’ll tak in a serious spirit.’

‘This sounds serious.’

‘It’s just extremely gratifying, as I think you’ll say. That young nobleman has been talking varra seriously to me. He is an honest-like chiel, and he tells me he is varra deep in love wi’ you, Mona, and he asket my consent in very proper language. I said I would speak to you, and lay the matter fair before you; but that I begged him not to address you till I had explained a bit, for I am no that sure how you would tak it. But I hope you will hear reason, for I should like to see you a countess, my bonnie bird, before I died, in spite o’ that conceited ape Everard, and his schemes.’

‘And Lord Fitzallan actually proposed for me!’ exclaimed Mona, much amused.

‘Why, uncle, you would not care to see me enrolled among the aristocrats for whom you have so much contempt—and then there is Kenneth! What is to become of him?’

‘Aweel, you see, I canna turn things upside doon, whatever my convictions may be; so while these rideec’lous distinctions continue, it’s no so bad to have a share o’ them. As to Kenneth,’ he waved his hand, ‘you say yourself he does na care for ye. We could find him another wife; and as my lord doesna want ony portion wi’ you, I could give a’ to Kenneth.’

‘I am sure you and Lord Fitzallan are very good in arranging for my future; but do you know that Lord Fitzallan is in the habit of proposing for every woman he meets, whether in a ballroom or behind a counter?—that he is a half-witted drunkard, only kept within decent bounds by the watchful care of his family?—that he has not a farthing he can call his own, and his father will not continue his allowance if he marries? Do you know all this?’

‘Naw!’ exclaimed Uncle Sandy, ‘and I will not believe it. He told me he was

ready to mak handsome settlements; to have the family diamonds reset for you; to have a couple o' rooms always ready for me at Fitzallan Towers, for he was sure Lord Lynebridge — that's the earl — his father, would enjoy a crack wi' me, as he is an advanced Liberal. Wha has been fillin' your mind wi' lees?'

'No one, uncle! Bertie Everard told me what I believe is perfectly true about poor Lord Fitzallan. He is really half-witted, and you must not seem to mind what he says, or you will make yourself and me ridiculous.'

'Bertie Everard!' repeated Uncle Sandy, wagging his head knowingly. 'I know a' aboot him,—a scheming, double-faced loon. You see, Mona, the crafty deil, he's next heir, and nat'rally *he* don't want my lord to marry, not he; and so he goes and tells you a bushel of lees. Half-witted indeed! weel he is whole-hearted, and knows a braw lassie when he sees her. Don't you listen to them havers, Mona—be guided by me, and then that ill-natured clan of Everards will just be crazy when you are lifted far above them.'

‘I am dreadfully annoyed, uncle, that you should be worried by this kind of false start; and you were so much better,—looking so well too. I wish Bertie had never brought poor Lord Fitzallan here. We were quite quiet and happy before they came. Thank goodness, your cure is nearly over! We will have been here three weeks next Wednesday, and let us go away somewhere.’

‘Why should I, Mona? and why do you listen to yon double-faced deil? I wish he’d just fall in the river and get drowned oot o’ the way, before he turned you against what I want, wi’ his fause havers!’ and the old man’s voice grew unsteady with eagerness.

Mona was greatly distressed that her uncle should be so possessed with this impossible scheme, and disappointed to find him so faithless to his own principles.

They talked long and earnestly. At length Mr Craig began to see that his splendid air-castle was baseless; his good-humour vanished, and with it Mona’s powers of pleasing. He complained of headache and rheumatism, pain in the heart, oppressed breathing, faintness, and

many other painful symptoms. He insisted on sending for M. le Directeur and the doctor, and dined in his own room.

Mona did not appear in public either, and Everard confiscated a charming bouquet of roses Lord Fitzallan was despatching to her, and bestowed it in his own name on the delighted Miss Clapton.

In the course of the evening a curious wildly-written and ill-spelt letter reached Mona from his lordship's pen, in which he professed the most ardent admiration for her beauty, her noble character, her general charms, and declaimed against the cruel plots of heartless relatives against his liberty and happiness.

This Mona tore up, and left unanswered. She took an opportunity, however, of informing Bertie Everard of the occurrence. Finally, the evening before she and Mr Craig left Contrexéville, Lord Fitzallan, in the absence of his valet and his cousin, got hold of a bottle of brandy, and was guilty of some wild antics, which convinced—but by no means consoled—Uncle Sandy.



CHAPTER VII.

THE SERPENT'S TOOTH.

QUIN the whole, Alexander Craig's retreat from Contrexéville was sudden, and barely in good order. He was not a little crestfallen by the complete collapse of the brilliant hopes which had dawned upon him for a moment. The excellent effect of the treatment and waters, however, had restored his elasticity, so that his sullenness and irritable depression did not last very long.

By the time they reached Strasbourg and were comfortably settled in a good hotel, he began to talk of making plans; maps and guide-books were brought out, and the old man brightened up when he

found Mona was highly pleased at the idea of seeing Switzerland.

She was a very efficient assistant, looking up the railway fares, counting the cost, and calculating the difference between foreign and English money.

‘As I canna get my ain hoose till next midsummer, I think we might just see a little of other countries till it’s ready, now that I am this side of the water, for I’ll no cross it again. It will be summat to talk of and think aboot when I am settled doon for the rest o’ my days at Craigdarroch.’

‘That would be very nice, uncle; and we might spend the winter in Dresden. There I should be quite at home, and I could really be of use to you.’

‘You’re no that useless here,’ said Uncle Sandy kindly; ‘and I could maybe get a smattering o’ German.’

‘Oh, no doubt.’

And so uncle and niece set out on a pilgrimage, visiting by very slow degrees the most interesting places in Switzerland and on the Rhine.

In this tour we will not attempt to

follow ; are not these places, their histories and attractions, written in the books of Murray and of Baedeker ?

For the winter they rested at Dresden, where Uncle Sandy was both comfortable and happy in the society of a Presbyterian minister of sound views, who taught Mr Craig chess, a great resource, if sometimes a little irksome to Mona.

It is remarkable how little change of place stamps its impress on time. A variety of residences in no way lengthens or shortens the period passed in them. But the contact with new characters, the association with individuals, who strike the electric chain with which we are darkly bound, these are true events which make the years or months in which they occurred stand out in clear relief from the dead level of our lives—and heart or mind history enters a new epoch marked by the evolution of some germ of action or thought which had lain inanimate, locked in the husk of unconsciousness, till the vivifying current from some kindred yet more advanced soul struck it and said, ‘ Let there be light.’

Thus the months which followed their departure from Contrexéville passed not unpleasantly, though in a dull routine. Sometimes a wonderful picture, a striking dramatic performance, woke Mona to mental activity, or a pleasant, thoughtful book gave her subject for reflection. In general, the English society of such places as Dresden is of the humdrum order, not stimulating in any sense, unless indeed it be sprinkled with keen original Americans. Still the quiet and sense of security assisted her to recover serenity, and face the future with steadiness, if no longer with rainbow-tinted hope.

On Uncle Sandy, too, the effect of foreign travel was good. He had lived too long in the narrow cell of self ever to be thoroughly emancipated from its contracting trammels, but a certain amount of enlightenment he could not resist. Nothing, however, touched his firm conviction that he was a man of wide information and 'soond' judgment. Indeed any variation in his former views only suggested that his perception must be singularly quick and clear to enable him

thus to assimilate new mental food. He spoke somewhat less broadly at the end than at the beginning of his Continental progress, and though still holding his 'siller' with a grip of iron, he began to understand what things cost, and what must be paid for. To Mona he was comparatively generous. Still it required some management to dress on the sum total of his occasional gifts.

To Madame Debrisay the loss of her dear companion was a real bereavement. She was a brave, bright woman, who never wasted time by sitting down to mourn over the inevitable, and always 'came up smiling' from the buffets of fortune; but life seemed dull and worthless when she was left to work for self alone. Affection was the motive-power of her existence. She was always striving for some; but since absinthe and cognac had cut short the career of the late lamented Debrisay, no one had ever belonged to her completely, as Mona did for the happy year and a half they had lived and worked together.

The pleasant, well-mannered Franco-

Irishwoman was a Bohemian of most imperfect education, shrewd observation, considerable scepticism, and great quickness in perceiving and seizing any opportunities which might offer for pleasure or profit. Yet no high-minded saint was ever more ready to sacrifice herself for those she loved,—to fill up any dangerous gulf with all she held most precious, that the one dear to her might pass over safely. Thus her cultivation of Uncle Sandy was a freewill offering to secure Mona's future, her encouragement of his wish to take his niece abroad a disinterested renunciation of the greatest charm her life had known since the illusions of youth had fled.

Mona's letters were her greatest comfort. They were long and full ; but the reader's keen sympathy detected the undertone of weariness arising from ungenial association, and at times she doubted if Mona was not paying too high a price for uncertain advantages hereafter.

So autumn, winter, and spring passed by, and midsummer was close at hand.

Madame Debrisay began to be anxious for a letter. She had not heard from Mona.

for more than a fortnight, and then she said that her uncle's plans were all unsettled, when one warm evening, as she was resting after a busy day, the post brought her the expected epistle. It was dated from Paris.

'I have been sight-seeing so constantly,' Mona wrote, 'and Uncle Sandy has been so undecided, that I could not write to you before, and this will not be worthy the name of a letter; but I shall be able to tell you all soon, for we start for London on the twenty-second, and my uncle wants you to find lodgings for us as near you as possible. I need not tell you they must be the most moderate you can find. We shall arrive at Charing Cross, where Kenneth Macalister is to meet us; and pray have dinner or supper ready for the whole party, your dear self included, at seven or eight o'clock. How we shall talk! How delightful it will be to see you again.'

Need it be said with what eager joy Madame Debrisay set about executing the welcome commission. How she reduced the rent first demanded, extinguished the gas charge, put out the kitchen fire, and

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pooh-poohed boot cleaning and 'cruets,' insisting that all should be lumped together for a fixed sum, and added to the weekly rent.

'There's nothing vexes a stingy man like an array of extras, when he has made up his mind to one thing,' she thought. 'Your money shall be paid regularly, but never put an extra on your bill—not even an etcetera. Write "one week's rent and attendance inclusive," with the rent we have agreed to opposite. Not another word, or the gentleman, who is as rich as a Jew, will walk out of the house. He is very careful of his money, but never keeps anyone waiting for it.'

Thus to the listening landlady, who was glad enough to secure a tenant, as the height of the season was past, and promised and vowed any amount of care and attention.

It was a fine, glowing evening when Madame Debrisay, in her prettiest cap, awaited the arrival of the travellers, having assisted to lay the table and make the place look neat and pretty. Of course those watched for were late, or seemed to be; but at last a cab, laden with luggage, drew

up to the gate, and the next moment Mona was in her friend's arms.

'Mee darlin' child! I have been that lonely without you! And you are looking right well, but terribly sunburnt.'

A hearty kiss, and then she went to greet Mr Craig, who descended from the cab with more alertness than she had ever seen him show before.

'Delighted to see you looking quite a new man, my dear Mr Craig!' she cried, a genuine look of pleasure dancing in her bright, dark eyes, as she shook hands with him heartily. 'Welcome back, after all these long months!'

'Thank ye! thank ye!' he returned, pleased with the warmth of her greeting. 'I'm not sorry to be back again. I hope you are weel?'

'Yes, quite well! I am an evergreen. Mr Macalister has been good enough to come to cheer me up occasionally. Very kind of him to trouble about an old woman. Glad to see you. Go inside, Mr Craig, your nephew and I will settle with the cabman.'

'Na, na! I'll just pay him myself.'

This done, Madame Debrisay and Mona had a few precious moments to themselves, and then the party sat down to high tea, with the sense of enjoyment arising from the mixture of familiarity and complete change.

‘How delicious the tea is!’ cried Mona. ‘That is one thing you rarely get abroad.’

‘Eh! but it is good to get a bit of dry toast again,’ said Uncle Sandy. ‘And Kenneth, my mon, I am right glad to see you!’

‘Thank you, sir. I’m sure I have missed you and—and Miss Mona here, sorely. It was a pleasure to have a bit talk with madame while you were away.’

‘But, uncle! Kenneth is not looking at all well. He is pale and thin. Have you been ill, Kenneth?’

‘Oh, nothing to speak on! Just a cold, and a heaviness in my limbs.’

‘Eh, mon!’ said Uncle Sandy, with a knowing smile, ‘it’s grand to have a braw young lassie speerin’ after your health.’

‘She was always fery good to me,’ said Kenneth uneasily.

Then as appetite was allayed, talk flowed full and free.

‘I think, uncle,’ said Mona, after a good deal of description of the people and places they had seen, ‘I think you ought to take Kenneth with you to Craigdarroch. It would do him a world of good. And he knows all about land and animals. He would be a better companion than I could be.’

‘Ah, but I canna want you! If I had my own way, I’d have you baith always by me.’

‘Well, I am sure that is not impossible,’ said Mona thoughtlessly.

She had forgotten her uncle’s schemes: it was so long since she had heard anything about them.

‘Ahem! I am glad to hear it,’ he returned dryly.

Words which stirred Mona’s memory. She laughed and blushed, glancing at Kenneth with friendly comprehension.

His face grew longer, and his eyes had a startled expression, which amused Mona.

But Uncle Sandy began to talk of going to bed, and asked his nephew to unstrap

his portmanteau for him ; and as his room adjoined the dining-room which Madame Debrisay had secured for their accommodation, they could hear the murmur of voices as Kenneth assisted his uncle to unpack.

‘Come, *mon ange* !’ cried Madame Debrisay ; ‘I will go and have a few words in peace with you while you get out your clothes. I am dying to hear all about everything !’

‘And I to tell you. Ah, Deb ! I wish I could live and work with you ! But, really, Uncle Sandy has been most kind to me, and I am fonder of him than I ever thought I should be. But sometimes his selfishness—his narrowness—repels me ; still, I feel bound to him !’

Safe in Mona’s little room upstairs, the friends enjoyed the delights of full, free interchange of confidence.

Of all Mona had to relate, the episode of Everard’s appearance at Contrexéville interested Madame Debrisay most.

‘To think of such an out-and-out Radical as Mr Craig wishing you to marry a nobleman !’ cried madame, shrugging

her shoulders when Mona had finished her story. 'Ah, *ciel!* what inconsistent creatures men are! I have heard of this Fitzallan, my dear; and he is as mad as a hatter!'

'He must be,' said Mona thoughtfully.

There was a few moments' pause, then Madame Debrisay said, in a gently remonstrating voice,—

'Come, now, my own darling; will you never tell me what is at the bottom of it all?'

'All what, Deb?'

'Your refusing poor Mr Waring, and the state you were in when you had consented to marry him before your grandmother's death! Why, I never saw such a face as you had! There was some man at the bottom of it.'

'I can only assure you, Deb, I was perfectly heart-whole when I accepted Mr Waring; and I wish you would not remind me of that dreadful time—pray put it out of your mind. I hope we may soon read the announcement of Mr Waring's marriage, and that he may live happy ever after.'

'Well, I can *not* understand it,' murmured

Madame Debrisay, in a wondering tone ;
' but I do understand that you don't choose
to tell.'

' Never mind, dear ; you must tell me
all your news now.'

Uncle Sandy did not seem in a hurry to
go north. He lingered in London, and
Kenneth was under orders to come up
every evening. Mona took advantage of
his presence to steal away occasionally to
enjoy some music and talk with Madame
Debrisay. These absences did not please
her uncle. He grew cross and fidgetty,
and Mona began to fear that he had left
his reasonableness at the other side of the
Channel.

It was quite ten days after their return
before Kenneth found an opportunity of
speaking with her alone. The only means
of securing a *tête-à-tête* was to go out
walking.

An unusually fine evening offered an ex-
cuse, and Mona gladly accepted Kenneth's
invitation—Madame Debrisay offering to
play chess with Uncle Sandy.

' Now that we have got clear of houses

and people, Kenneth,' began Mona, as soon as they succeeded in finding a secluded seat in Kensington Gardens, 'tell me what is troubling you, for I see that you are troubled.'

'Troubled? Yes, I should think so. Indeed, I am not one bit more forward than when we parted, and I doubt if I shall get away this summer. Then Mr Black is in worse health than ever: we fear he will have to leave the school; and here is my uncle hurrying me to marry you—or, rather, to ask you again.'

'Well, ask me again, Kenneth,' said Mona sweetly, 'and I'll give you the same answer.'

'Eh, it will be hard to put him off now,' groaned Kenneth; 'he is bent upon it whatever.'

'Still, you cannot marry me against my will?'

'No; but Uncle Sandy says you refused a grand nobleman for my sake, Mona?'

'No; for my own sake. He was a poor, half-witted creature. Kenneth, we must put a stop to this! You must tell Uncle

Sandy that you have asked me again, and that I have refused you ; tell him you do not care to have anything to do with a girl who is so averse to accept you. If my uncle calls me to account, I will settle the matter very quickly ; I am quite able to earn my bread, and I only stay with him from a feeling of duty and compassion. Let him break with me if he chooses. He might take you to manage the farm, and then he would not be lonely. I do not want to interfere with your heirship, Kenneth.'

'Eh, but I am sure of that, cousin Mona ! Nor would I rob you. Anyhow, I'll speak as you advise. I am sorry to vex the old man, and I mean no offence to you. If I had not known Mary I might have grown fond of you. There is no knowing.'

'No, Kenneth,—no knowing to what you might have been reduced,' she returned, laughing good-humouredly at the simple self-conceit which blinded him to his total unfitness to be her husband.

Then the young Highlander indulged in a long, discursive monologue respecting

his trials and troubles,—his unfitness for his present occupation,—his longing for a free air out-door life.

It was late when they reached home, and found that Uncle Sandy had retired to bed with a bad headache, and, according to Madame Debrisay, a bad fit of sulks, as he had lost the game—and to be beaten, especially by a woman, was intolerable.

‘Your uncle desired me to say that he wished to see you late or early to-morrow evening, Mr Kenneth,’ she concluded, ‘so try and come as early as you can.’

‘Very well,’ said Kenneth, looking as if he did not like it.

‘Do you think to-morrow will be the crucial test, Kenneth?’ asked Mona, answering the look.

‘I feel as if it would be.’

‘Then do not fear. You will get through, and it is better to have it out.’

‘Yes ; but you have not so much at stake as I have, cousin Mona.’

‘That is true!—but “faint heart never won fair lady.”’

‘And remember you have two bright

women to help you, Mr Kenneth,' added Madame Debrisay.

'You are fery good, fery,' he said warmly. 'And now I must bid you fare-well. I am late as it is, and I want to write a long letter before I sleep.'

'May I guess who to, Kenneth?'

'Ah, you know, I daresay.'

'That poor fellow is over-weighted with heart for the race of life,' said Madame Debrisay reflectively, when they were alone. 'It is about the worst sort of weight a man can carry! It's sad to see how good fellows fail by hundreds, while your hard, wiry, indifferent fox-terrier-like men scramble over friends and enemies alike to success, no matter how many they tread down in the process. That boy is made for a pastoral life, with a dash of the hunter's—I am sorry for him in Uncle Sandy's clutches.'

'Yet Uncle Sandy tries to be just.'

'Maybe so; but he never thinks of other people's wants and wishes, only of what he wants himself—and you see one man's receipt for perfect bliss may be needles and pins to his neighbour.'

‘I feel as if we should have a tug of war to-morrow. I earnestly hope my uncle will not break with Kenneth. I am really much more independent, with *you* to back me, dear Deb.’

‘Well, well, I begin to think it might be a long, hard service for an inadequate return. But what I fear is that between two stools you may fall to the ground. If you are to work for yourself, you have as good as lost two seasons, for the holidays are close at hand. I wish the old gentleman would declare his intentions!’

All the next day Uncle Sandy was silent, touchy, dissatisfied. He felt out of sorts, and was quite sure the veal he had eaten the previous day had not been sufficiently cooked. How was it that he could eat veal abroad, and not at home? etc. etc.

These symptoms boded ill for the evening’s interview.

When tea time approached, Mona observed,—

‘As you want to speak particularly to Kenneth Macalister this evening, shall I go out of the way to Madame Debrisay?’

‘Naw,’ said Uncle Sandy emphatically. ‘I’ll likely want you, so you had best be at hand in your own room.’

‘Very well,’ returned Mona.

Kenneth presented himself in tolerably good time—yet not before Uncle Sandy had began to fidget and fret because he had not come sooner.

The private conference between uncle and nephew had not lasted long, before a message was despatched to Mona, who was trying to read in her own room.

‘Mr Craig says would you please to come down, miss.’

So Mona descended. Uncle Sandy was grasping the arms of his chair, and speaking in an angry tone. Kenneth was standing on the hearthrug, with flashing eyes and a heightened colour.

‘Such wilfu’ contumaciousness,’ were the words which hissed from Uncle Sandy’s lips as his niece entered the room.

‘Come here, Mona! Is it true what Kenneth’s been telling me—that you have again refused to be his wife?’

‘It is!’

‘And has he sought you with the respect

and the—the—perseverance that he should show?’

‘Yes, uncle. I have no fault whatever to find with him.’

‘Then why are you sae obstinate? Why will you reject what’s for your ain good and happiness, and refuse to agree to what I have planned for you?’

‘I am sorry to disappoint you, uncle, but in such a matter I cannot go against my own instincts.’

‘Instincts indeed! You are no a cat or a dog! Why did ye speak to a respectable young man—your uncle’s heir, mind you—in a way that gars him say he’ll never ask you mair?’

‘I am very sorry if I offended Kenneth, for I really like him, but I thought it only right to explain that I could give him no hope.’

‘And he did nae offend you?’

‘Oh no, uncle! Kenneth never would offend a lady.’

‘I am glad you say it, for I have been angered against him. Now be a wise lassie, and mak up your mind to tak him if he will ask you again, then ye can baith

come awa' wi' me to Craigdarroch ! for I doubt but the man I let the land to is just making a kirk and a mill of it ; in anither year, I'll get it into my ain hands, so I'll want Kenneth to be my factor, and we twa men folk would be ill aff without a lassie to look after us—so you speak up Kenneth, my man, and ask her before my face.'

'No! Kenneth, do not!' cried Mona, colouring with pain at having to disappoint her uncle, and also with irritation at the denseness which prevented him from perceiving the unsuitability of such a marriage. 'I should only repeat what I have said before. Though I am heartily sorry to refuse any request of yours, uncle, it is impossible I can let anyone choose a husband for me.'

'And I must declare I canna wish to marry a young leddy who has refused me three times! It would be very unwise to tak a reluctant wife. May be some other young leddy—'

Kenneth got so far, when Mr Craig interrupted him bitterly,—

'Ay, ay, my lad! there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught; an' I see it's

no' your fault. I don't know what's the matter wi' you, Mona? If you have another lad in your e'e, it'll be some ne'er-doweel, I am afeard. If it's yon sneering deevil Everard, he wad na' walk across the street for you. You'll be sorry for your contradictiousness one day.'

'My dear uncle,' laughing, 'I never supposed Bertie Everard cared for mortal but himself. I assure you I have no lad of any description in my mind's eye.'

'Aweel!' cried Uncle Sandy, greatly enraged, 'it is varra ungrateful and unbecoming to mak a laughing-stock of your uncle, wha' has spent a kist o' siller on you! To think that you'll refuse a fine good young man, and never give a thought to your puir uncle's comfort, all for mere selfishness, and an ill-placed fancy. A woman's life is no good to her, if she has na' a husband to rule her.'

'In that I cannot agree with you! I am sincerely sorry to disappoint you; but if you think of it, you will see how impossible it is for anyone to choose a husband or wife for another. I am by no means

afraid of managing my own life unassisted by a husband.'

'Eh, you think you might rule the kingdom, I daursay! but I'll no have onybody wi' me that will not hear reason, or respect my wishes. Kenneth has done his best to obey me, so he shall come with me to Craigdarroch! and you can stay with that fantastical Frenchwoman, who, I suppose, encourages ye in—'

'That must not be, uncle,' said Kenneth firmly. 'I will not stand in my cousin's way.'

He had been fidgeting uneasily, eager to put in a word.

'You'll not stan' in your cousin's way! you'll not! What's that to you? Are you baith so daft-like as to think you can divide my property and—and my siller betwixt ye, under my very een, before the breath is oot o' my body? Eh! but I'll give neither of ye a bawbee! I'll just build a retreat for puir meenisters, and endow it. Why should I fash myself wi' a couple of contermacious young fules?'

'And you may please yourself for me, uncle!' cried Kenneth; 'anyway, it will no

weigh on my conscience that I didn't try to do as you desired.'

'Aweel, I know that, an' I shall not forget it, though I will not have you dictating and presuming. You just give notice to your employers, and come awa wi' me to Craigdarroch. And you, Mona, I am done wi' you ; you may go to your chum. I renounce you ; you are just heartless, like your auld grandmither's fine aristocratic freends, and look down on folks that are better than yourself.'

'You ought not to be so angry with me, uncle?' said Mona gently. 'I am only exercising a right of choice that belongs to the humblest and poorest. I am really grieved to think we must part. You have been very good to me, and I hope I have been some comfort to you ; but there must be no misunderstanding : I never will accept a husband, save of my own free choice!'

'And a mull you'll mak of it ! Kenneth, my mon, I'll tak a glass o' water wi' a drap of whisky—just ring the bell. I'll trouble you nae mair, Miss Craig ; you can drop my name again, for a' I care, and gang yer

ways. You, Kenneth, just give warning to your landlady: I'll give you Mona's room.

'But, uncle, I cannot—' began Kenneth.

'Do not contradict him,' whispered Mona, passing close by, as she approached her uncle. 'Good-bye then,' she said kindly, 'I will never offer to return, but if you want me, and ask me, I will come to you!'

She tried to take his hand, but he pushed hers away, and turned his face from her like a naughty child.

Mona looked at him kindly, and a little sadly, and then left the room, forbidding Kenneth, by a gesture, to follow her.





CHAPTER VIII.

AT VARIANCE.



CHANGE had indeed come o'er the spirit of her dream. Mona scarcely expected such energetic action on her uncle's part. That he would be angry she expected, but she did not think he would take such strong measures. However, there was nothing for it but submission to the decree of banishment pronounced against her, she therefore packed up her belongings, told the landlady she was going away for a short time, and retreated to Madame Debrisay.

That lady was not at home. She had gone to pass the evening with a German violinist and his wife, with whom she

was on rather intimate terms, so Mona sat down to wait for her.

She had often felt weary of poor Uncle Sandy's whims and exactions, but she had grown to care more for him than she knew. He had become so dependent on her, that the maternal instincts of a womanly heart had gone out to the creature she protected. Moreover, she believed him to be a greater sufferer than he really was. That he should attempt to dictate to her in such a purely personal matter, was hurtful enough, but that he should rudely turn her out, wounded her deeply. How miserable the old man would be, too, all alone, doing battle with the landlady, and fretting over a hundred-and-one trifling annoyances from which he had hitherto been shielded. Was it possible that the moisture on her cheek was a tear? She was afraid that, on the whole, she was no favourite of fortune. It seemed her fate to be constantly uprooted. How little rest she had known since she left the tranquil seclusion of her Dresden school—only a few months of feverish, fitful joy, and then clouds and darkness.

Madame Debrisay did not come in till ten o'clock.

'And is it here you are, all alone by yourself in the dark?' she cried, coming in quickly through the soft gloom of a summer's night. 'This is too bad! To think of me talking politics to that castle-building German, when I might have been here with you, dear. How is it you got away from our dear Old Man of the Sea?'

'Easily enough, dear Deb! Uncle Sandy has turned me out because I have decidedly refused to marry Kenneth Macalister.'

'Turned you out!' repeated Madame Debrisay, as she struck a match and lit the gas. 'Has he gone off his head?'

'I do not think so; but I have ventured to believe *you* will take me in, and in that belief I have told Mrs Puddiford that my room was wanted, so I came over here?'

'Turned you out!' repeated Madame Debrisay, sitting down suddenly and taking off her bonnet, which she dropped on the floor; 'and all for not marrying that

long-legged Highlander, who is not fit to dust your shoes.'

'No, no, Deb; he is a very good fellow?'

'Oh, good enough, but not for such as you. So I suppose it is all over!'

'What is all over?' asked Mona.

'My hopes that your uncle would provide for you. Now you are no better off than you were before. Indeed you are worse off, for you have to make up for all the time you spent wandering about with that old bear.'

'The usual fate of legacy-hunters,' returned Mona, smiling.

'You are no legacy-hunter, Mona. I declare that cantankerous uncle of yours can have no more heart than a flint.'

'I do not believe he is quite heartless,' said Mona thoughtfully; 'I believe he is fond of me, and will soon recall me.'

'When I hope you will have more spirit than to respond!' cried madame indignantly; 'he deserves to be left to hirelings for the rest of his days.'

'That would be a cruel punishment for

an outbreak of temper : it was nothing more. Come, dearest Deb, I am tired and depressed ; I will go to bed. Do you know that it is very delightful the idea of breakfasting *tête-à-tête* with you to-morrow ?'

'Is it, my darling ? Ah, it warms my heart to hear you say so ! If you belonged to me now ; if you were my own, own child, oh, it would give me the strength of a dozen women to work for you and fight for you ; not but I'd do it all the same, only I'd have a right to you then.'

'Until I married some selfish tyrant of a man, who would show his love by separating me from you,' returned Mona, taking her hand in both hers with an affectionate smile.

'Ah, just so,' sighed Madame Debrisay ; 'there are eddies of misfortune at every bend in the stream of life ; some slip past them and more slip in. I don't know how it is, Mona, you always remind me of my precious baby girl that was taken from me when she was two years old. She had hair just like yours. How much the heart can live through ! I died

one death when I found out the real man I had married, but I came to life again with the life I gave. Then I went down to the grave once more with my sweet, sweet baby, and dragged on a half-conscious existence till poor Debrisay went: that took a load off me. I began to be a living woman again. The music always was a comfort to me; and here I am, battling for bread, and taking what pleasure I can get! Is it not amazing the vitality of some natures? Now I have you to look after, dear, it doubles my life. Ah, what would we be without love? It is the true religion, and the real damning sin is selfishness! Good-night, dear.'

The next day was one of Madame Debrisay's busiest, and it was exceedingly wet. Mona sat in-doors very contentedly, busy with book or needle, and Uncle Sandy made no sign.

The following evening, Kenneth made his appearance, with an exceedingly perturbed aspect.

The partners were sitting at table enjoying a late tea when he came in.

'Well, Mr Macalister, what news?' cried

Madame Debrisay, putting down the teapot to shake hands with him.

‘Good-evening, Kenneth. You do not look too happy,’ said Mona.

‘Happy,’ he repeated; ‘I am just miserable. I am thinking Uncle Sandy’s gone clean daft. He was up in the City, at our place, and saw Mr Sinclair—that is the principal partner. Came in all the rain in a cab from Moorgate Street. He told Mr Sinclair that he was going to adopt me, and requested I might be allowed to leave, as he could not go to his place in the Highlands without me. So I was called up, and old Sinclair made me a speech about my good fortune, and my excellent conduct while in the service of the house (I don’t believe he knew my name rightly half-an-hour before); and the two old fellows complimented each other. I fancy Mr Sinclair thinks I am to come in for ten thousand a year at least. This morning all the clerks were congratulating me, and I felt like a thief.’

‘Why should you, Kenneth? I assure you I should have been more miserable than you *look*, if I thought my uncle had

quarrelled with you about me. I have perfect confidence in your loyalty.'

'And you may have that, cousin Mona; but it's many a long day before I can be of any use to you.'

'Let me give you a cup of tea, Mr Kenneth,' said Madame kindly. 'It is my opinion,' she continued, as she poured it out, 'that neither one or other of you will ever see a sous of your uncle's money. He will get all he can out of you, and then leave all he has to some church or institution, or something wicked of that kind.'

'No, I do not think that,' returned Mona thoughtfully. 'I believe he is quite earnest in his intention now, but he might get angry again and change his mind.'

'After all,' cried Madame Debrisay, 'I don't believe he has much to leave behind him. He talks big; but for all the cry, I suspect there is not much wool.'

'There is no telling,' said Kenneth. 'But I think he is rich. My poor mother thought he was *fery* rich.'

'We shall never know till poor Uncle Sandy has no further need of our services,'

said Mona, smiling. 'So there is no use conjecturing.'

'That is true. Eh, but he is dreadfully angered against Mona,' returned Kenneth, addressing Madame Debrisay. 'When I said I would come over and see her, he broke out against her, and forbade me to cross your threshold. I could not stand that. I just told him that I was willing to obey him in many ways, but that neither of us had any right to quarrel with her. So after some words—a good many words—he told me to do as I liked, but I was never to name your name to him. He is awful miserable,—just fretting the flesh off his bones. We are to start for Craigdarroch on Monday.'

'On Monday!' exclaimed madame. 'And will they let you away from the office so soon?'

'I don't think I am so valuable that they want to keep me,' said Kenneth, with a grin. 'Anyhow, we are off on Monday; and I can't say I like having the care of Uncle Sandy all that way. We are to stay a couple of days in Glasgow, that he may see his man of business, and then go on

to Kirkcubright—that's the nearest station to Craigdarroch. It's on a loch, I believe, and it's a fine place.'

'You must write and let us know how you get on, Kenneth.'

'I will drop you a line, cousin. The worst is, I see no chance of getting away north to Glencorrie. My uncle will not let me stir from him.'

'That will be trying. You would want my help there, Kenneth.'

'Eh, I should indeed. Uncle Sandy treats me very different from what he does you. I cannot manage for him in the house, but I am not afraid of the fields and the woods. I'll manage them fine. I was always with the laird's factor till my poor mother died, and then Uncle Sandy would have me in an office to learn business.'

Some more talk and friendly conjecture made time pass quickly till Kenneth rose to bid them good-night.

Mona could hardly believe that Uncle Sandy would leave town without seeing her, and she kept a good deal in-doors until the Monday fixed for his departure; but the old man made no advance. Indeed,

one afternoon Madame Debrisay met him walking with the aid of his stick, when he passed her without the slightest sign of recognition. She came home in high wrath, and denounced his folly and obstinacy, and many other bad qualities, with much eloquence. Mona said nothing.

She was hurt by her uncle's conduct, but not inconsolable. She only regretted seriously the period of the year at which the break had occurred, as the difficulty of finding employment forced her to impinge on her small capital.

Madame Debrisay insisted on her being a guest for at least a month, to which the fear of offending her kind hostess compelled Mona to agree. Otherwise, the rest and congenial companionship were very delightful.

Uncle Sandy had been gone about a week, and the last days of July were fast slipping away, when one warm sultry afternoon, as Mona was leaving Marshall & Snelgrove's, where she had been shopping for madame, whose soul expanded at sale time, a smart footman overtook her, accosting her with the words, 'If you

please'm, Lady Finistoun would be glad to speak to you.'

'Lady Finistoun?' repeated Mona, looking round. 'Where is she?'

'Her ladyship is in the carriage, close by.'

Following the man, Mona was soon shaking hands with her former ally.

'I was so afraid I should miss you, dear,' cried the young peeress, shaking hands warmly with her. 'I was afraid you had vanished from me altogether. Bertie told me about meeting you abroad with a wonderful old millionaire of an uncle. Come, let me drive you wherever you are going, or, better still, let me take you to see baby. Such a dear darling babs. You will be enchanted with him. Do come in. Open the door, William.'

'Oh, yes! I should be so delighted to see your baby, dear Evelyn!' said Mona.

The next minute she was seated beside Lady Finistoun, and driving towards that lady's house.

'Why did you not let me know you were in town?'

'I have not been long here,' returned

Mona, 'and I have been busy. Nor did I think of looking you up. You see it is no use attempting to be on the old footing. We must drift apart.'

'Oh, nonsense! You look as well—indeed better than ever. You will never lose your style, Mona, and I daresay you will marry very well, especially with this rich uncle behind you.'

'My uncle has an heir.'

'No! Has he? How very disgraceful! Never mind, dear, you are evidently a favourite of fortune. Where are you staying now?'

'With Madame Debrisay.'

'And what have you done with the uncle?'

'He has quarrelled with me and left me.'

'Oh, you foolish girl! How did you offend him?'

'It is too long a story to tell you now. Tell me about yourself.'

Nothing loth, Lady Finistoun poured forth the annals of a golden life flooded with the sunshine of prosperity,—with busy pleasure and careless, though kindly, happiness.

They were, she said, on the point of starting for a month's cruise in northern latitudes, with a gay party, in the Duke of Hallamshire's yacht, during which time the son and heir, now nine months old, was to stay with Lady Mary at the Chase.

'By-the-bye, Geraldine is engaged,' she went on—'engaged to a charming man, only he has no money, so they are obliged to wait till he gets an appointment. My father is rather cross about it, but I dare say it will all come right.'

Here they reached Hyde Park Gardens, and Lady Finistoun sent a peremptory message to nurse. She soon appeared with the Honourable Hector Aubrey Douglas Montgomerie in her arms—a very active young gentleman, who did his best to precipitate himself head-foremost on the floor—jumping, crowing, clutching at his nurse's cap, and slobbering after the fashion of babies from St James' to St Giles'. He held out his plump, mottled arms to his delighted mother, who proudly took him, and then, as the highest mark of affection and confidence, gave him to Mona. She received him with no small apprehension,

though pronouncing him, with genuine admiration, to be a splendid fellow, and 'so like Lord Finistoun.'

'Do you see the likeness too? Yes, I think he is. But do you know, Mona, he has the Newburgh grey eyes? They are like yours, Mona! Don't you think baby's eyes are very like Miss Joscelyn's—I mean Miss Craig's? (Your name always puzzles me, Mona).'

'Perhaps so, my lady. They are very fine eyes, any way.'

A little more showing off, and nurse judged that her lady had had as much of baby's society as was good for them all. She suggested that the young gentleman's own apartment was cooler and fresher for him than the drawing-room. After a little more kissing and cuddling he was taken away, and Lady Finistoun and her kinswoman sat down to tea.

'I am so glad you are pleased with the boy! I could see by your eyes you were ready to love him. There are lots of people ready to exclaim, "He is a fine child!" but few look at him as you did, dear Mona!' cried the young mother.

‘Take off your hat, and we shall have a nice chat over our tea. I am not at home to anyone, Tomkins’—to the butler. ‘I want you to come and stay with me at Strathairlie. As soon as our cruise is over we are going for a week to the Chase, and will be in the Highlands the second week of September. Will you come, Mona?’

‘I do not think I can. I shall want to be in town by the first of October, and—’

‘Oh, but you really must come! And then, didn’t Bertie tell me that the millionaire uncle has a place quite near. Then you can make friends with him. We will ask him to dinner. Those sort of people are always so pleased when they are asked to dinner.’

‘I do not think Uncle Sandy would dine with anyone.’

‘I don’t believe that! We are going to have rather a pleasant party. I am sorry my father and mother cannot come. They talk of going to Vienna till after Christmas. I should like you to be good friends again.’

‘Have they not forgiven me yet?’ asked Mona, with a smile.

‘Well—a—no, I am afraid not. But dear mother is not an irreconcilable. When you meet you will be all right. Lord and Lady Waterton are coming, and Colonel Markham, the great shot; then, later, Sir Arthur Fitzgerald and Mr Mercer, the man who has such a lovely baritone; Mrs Barrington and the two girls, a brother of Finistoun’s, and oh, I cannot remember all! We cannot put up a great many, but I have never seen the place yet. I believe the scenery about it is lovely. If you do not come to me or go to your uncle, where can you go this autumn?’

‘I shall not go anywhere. I shall stay very thankfully with my good friend Madame Debrisay, who never changes towards me.’

‘Ah, yes, she is a dear old thing! But fancy staying in London all the year. You will make yourself ill, Mona.’

‘Just think, Evelyn, of the hundreds of people who never quit it, and live on.’

‘Then they are quite different.’

‘I cannot see,’ began Mona, when

Lady Finistoun interrupting her, exclaimed,—

‘ Oh, Mona! do you remember Captain Lisle?’

‘ I do.’

‘ He has come into a large property and a baronetcy.’

‘ Oh, indeed! How did that happen?’

‘ I think he always expected it. Old Sir Howard Lisle was a relation of his father’s, and as they were a non-marrying set of men, our acquaintance, though not a near cousin, was the next heir.’

So, after all, he was not a poor man. He had wealth and position almost in his grasp when he shrank from sharing his life with her, thought Mona, while Lady Finistoun rattled on. ‘ But I suppose there are many like him,’ was her conclusion.

‘ I rather think my mother would have liked him for Geraldine, but I am not so sure he would have made a good husband,’ Lady Finistoun was saying when Mona listened again. ‘ These fascinating, all-accomplished men seldom do. They tell queer stories about him. The Countess of Northallerton went out of her mind about

him, so it is said, and only the earl died so suddenly, there would have been a fearful row.'

'He was very agreeable,' said Mona quietly.

'Yes. He has been very popular in India, but he is coming home now on "urgent private affairs," I suppose, and will probably leave the army. You are not going yet, Mona?'

'I must. Madame Debrisay will be looking for me.'

'Oh! she will not mind, when she knows I kept you; and I do not know when I shall see you again, for I have more engagements than I can manage every day before we go down to Cowes.'

'Still, dear, I must go. I am so glad I saw the baby. Madame Debrisay will be charmed to hear all about him.'

'Then leave me your address. I am determined to make you come to me at Strathairlie. Perhaps I shall have a peep at you when I pass through town in September.'

'Oh, yes. I will write it in your address-book.'

Lady Finistoun embraced her affectionately, and straightway forgot all about her till they met again.

Mona walked leisurely home through Kensington Gardens in a very thoughtful mood. She was truly delighted to see Evelyn so bright—so happy. She had keenly noticed the beauty and richness of her surroundings—every minutiae of her dress, of the china and silver in which their tea was served, the noiseless perfection of the service, all indicated the luxurious ease of her life, and of the life which she represented. Yet on sounding her own heart, Mona was glad to find that it had roused no regretful longing, no repining or dissatisfaction with her own lot. The whole routine of splendid ease would not have been so sweet to Mona as the simple evening meal which awaited her, seasoned as it was by true affection and complete sympathy.

Of course Evelyn had these also. But the general effect of her visit was to increase her thankfulness that she had resolutely refused to marry Mr Waring. She felt, as her self-knowledge increased, that

she dared not risk her future with anyone she did not deeply and truly love. Hers was a heart that could not long remain empty, swept and garnished.

The encounter with Lady Finistoun afforded much matter for talk to Madame Debrisay. She did not press Mona to accept her invitation.

‘I am not sure it would do you any good, dear. It is better to keep with those of your own trade. It went to my heart to see you leave your beautiful home, and the society you were used to ; but it had to be done, and there is no use in looking back. Life has many sides, and there’s none without its own spark of light.’

So the friends enjoyed the quiet holiday time together. Prudence forbade their leaving town. But Mona, fresh from her wanderings, was glad to rest ; and Madame Debrisay was quite content while she had Mona.

Kenneth wrote occasionally. Uncle Sandy was greatly annoyed at the mismanagement of all things appertaining to the farm during his absence. He had dis-

missed the man he had left in charge, and was determined, with Kenneth's help, to direct everything himself; but he was very unwell and fractious. He never mentioned Mona's name, but Kenneth was of opinion that he thought of her a good deal. Meantime there was no chance of his getting away, and he began to fear that it would be many a month before he could see his Highland Mary.

The days and weeks flew by rapidly, and Madame Debrisay was beginning to think of work again, when one morning in the first week of September, the post brought Mona a letter addressed in exceedingly shaky, spider-like caligraphy. It bore the post-mark of 'Kirkcaldy;' and having looked at it earnestly for a moment, she exclaimed,—

'Why, here is a letter from Uncle Sandy!'

'You don't say so! Read it to me, if you will.'

'I'll try. What an awful hand.'

'MY DEAR NIECE,—As you have had time to think over your unkind and un-

grateful conduct to your natural protector and nearest of kin, I make no doubt you are sorry and ashamed of yourself. But, as youth is always wilful and self-opinionated, I dare say false shame holds you back from saying you are sorry. Therefore, for the sake of your poor father, and indeed for your own, I will believe that you say them in your heart, and are willing to atone to me, by trying to be a comfort to my poor troubled old age, which you have been, all the time we journeyed together.

‘Kenneth is a good lad, and decently sensible out of doors, but within it is awful desolate without a woman to order things. I therefore propose that, if you are penitent, as I hope you are, you come and stay with me as my daughter, to look after me, and rule my house, and I promise that you shall not be asked to wed with anyone you do not like, but that if you *do* wed, and leave me, you will find some wise-like woman to bide with me, and care for me, in your place.

‘Now, you must write at once to me, yes or no, and then come as soon as you can start. Kenneth shall meet you in

Glasgow. As you are young and strong, you might take the night train and come on here when you have taken a bite of breakfast in Glasgow. Feeling sure you will come to your old uncle, I enclose you a post-office order for three pounds five shillings and sixpence, to pay your fare (second class), and a cab and such like. And I'll give you a trifle for clothes every quarter regular, as we may agree upon. If your heart is good towards me, you might lose no time and be with me by Thursday first. For I am just wearying for you, my dearie! And give my respects to madame. Maybe she'll come up in holiday-time and pay us a visit. It is always a treat to look on the Highlands, and you'll be bonnier than ever when you live in the sweet mountain air. Now just answer straight, and as you answer, so I'll be your loving uncle or no.

‘ALEXANDER CRAIG.’

‘Well,’ said Madame Debrisay, her countenance falling, ‘I always expected it. What'll you do, dear?’

‘Do?’ repeated Mona slowly. ‘I scarcely think I have any choice. You see, he

voluntarily removes all cause of complaint ; but it is hard to leave you, Deb.'

'It is cruelly hard to let you go ; but I must. Now, Mona, my dear, be careful in answering that letter. You must show him that you are sacrificing independence to nurse him. And do not commit yourself to stay with him always.'

'How can I bargain with a poor old man that loves me?'

'He loves his "siller" better! You must not sacrifice yourself, Mona. Let me write what I want you to say, and you can modify it if you like ; but you must let him see that you are giving up independence for his sake. Now is the time to make a *clientèle*, and you resign the chance.'

'Very well, Deb. In such a matter two heads are better than one. There is one point I will stipulate for—a yearly holiday to come and see you! That will revive me, and you too ; will it not?'

'Ah, my darlin' child, it will indeed!'

The tears sprang to Madame Debrisay's bright, expressive eyes, and leaning towards her beloved pupil, she kissed her affectionately.

‘Now, dear,’ she continued, ‘let us get rid of the breakfast things, and concoct our famous letter.’

It was a piece of work not to be quickly done. The collaborators had wide differences of opinion as to what was and was not to be insisted upon. Mona had mostly her own way, but, nevertheless, was a good deal influenced by her friend’s shrewd advice.

Finally, the letter was despatched. As soon as the post could bring a reply came another epistle agreeing to everything, and expressing Uncle Sandy’s extreme satisfaction. He gave his niece a few commissions to execute respecting books, papers, etc., and promised to subscribe to an Edinburgh circulating library, that they might have entertainment and instruction in the long winter nights.

The ensuing week was a busy one. London dressmakers were not to be thoughtlessly left behind. Preparations for a prolonged sojourn in comparative wilds were to be made. And Mona dearly loved becoming dress and pretty things. Still madame preached economy, and the

necessity of considering Mona's tiny capital as too sacred to be touched.

'You never know, dear, when the rainy day may come. So if you take a trifle now, be sure you pay it back when you get your first quarter. And now and again send me what you can spare to put away for you.'

'Yes! I promise, Deb.'

'And if your uncle gives you a present of money, save it up. It is an awful thing to feel you haven't a penny, as I did when I had buried poor Debrisay. How I ever got through, God only knows.'

'He helped you, dear Deb, because you helped yourself.'

Madame was lost in thought, and did not reply.

'I'd have a dinner dress, though!' she exclaimed suddenly; 'a dinner dress of black satin and jet lace. You'd look as fair as a lily in it; and some blush roses on your shoulder, to show you were not in mourning.'

'I have two dinner dresses, you know, that only need a little doing up. And probably I shall never need such a thing.'

‘You don’t know! When Lady Finistoun is your neighbour, you can’t refuse to dine with her. I should not be surprised if all the lairds in the country side were to lay themselves at your feet. They don’t often see anything like you!’

Mona laughed heartily at her imaginative friend, and then the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a letter from Kenneth—very hastily but joyously written. He was full of the anticipated pleasure of meeting Mona, and told her that Mary Black was to be in Glasgow staying with some relations, and he would get leave to stay a day, and would also introduce his lady-love to his cousin. Uncle Sandy, he said, had quite ‘perked up’ since he knew Mona was coming, and, in short, life looked like a sunny, unruffled lake, *pro tem.*, to the sanguine young Highlander.

Then the hour of parting came soon—too soon.

What sandwiches Madame Debrisay cut, what biscuits and grapes she bought, how neatly she did them all up in a picturesque little basket with loving care, may be imagined.

She loaded her 'dear child' with all kinds of little, useful presents, and she sent a warm waistcoat of her own knitting to Uncle Sandy, in preparation for the winter.

'I want to stand well with him, dear, for your sake ; and he never quite took to me.'

Finally she parted from Mona with nearly dry eyes.

'Why should I make her heart ache,' thought the kindly woman.

But she was deeply gratified by the profound regret with which Mona bid her good-bye.

'My only idea of home is with you, dear Deb. You shall have a letter every week, and you must write regularly too.'

So madame stood smiling to the last, till the last glimmer of the red light at the end of the train had vanished, and then went home, to have it out unrestrainedly with her sorrow.





CHAPTER IX.

AMANG THE HEATHER.



RAIGDARROCH was a beautiful secluded spot on the side of a hill,—the advanced post of a mountain range, which upheaved its lofty crests further inland. It looked west, upon the loch (an inlet of the sea), which lay directly beneath it, and south towards the mountains, which trended to the east. The wild stretch of rocky heather-grown upland, called Strathairlie deer forest, lay to the north, and immediately at the other side of the hill, barely three miles distant, was the shooting-lodge of Lord Finistoun.

The house was old, grey, and rambling, having been much added to ; and, thanks to

the shelter of the hill, boasted the ornament of surrounding woods, not only of fir trees, but beech and numerous oaks. It had been the residence of the old lairds of Strathairlie. They had passed away long ago, and their lands had been divided among different purchasers. The Lord Finistoun of that day had bought the deer forest, and built the lodge. A Glasgow manufacturer bought the house, the home, and two or three other farms, which formed the estate of Craigdarroch, for a summer residence. He failed, and it was again brought to the hammer, when Sandy Craig became the possessor, for a sum decidedly below its real value. He also bought a good deal of the furniture, establishing himself with much glee. But it was somewhat late in life to change his habits. Farming proved a costly amusement. The want of steady, regular employment made him irritable, and a cheeseparing spirit as regarded the consumption of coal, coupled with the dampness of mid-winter on the western coast, induced rheumatism. So Sandy Craig thought himself in a very bad way, and betook himself to London for superior

medical advice, with the results we have seen.

The fortune which hard work, coupled with the whim of a wealthy testator, had brought him, did not bestow much happiness. He was proud to be Craig of Craigdarroch ; it sounded territorial, the name, signifying ‘ Rock of the Oaks,’ was a happy accident ; but he grew nervous in the lonely mansion, yet was never quite content away from it.

The shootings attached—a piece of moorland, not very extensive—was alive with birds, let well in the season, and although decrying sport as ‘ just a play for fules,’ he never disdained to take the rent.

The place seemed to him after his long absence at once more beautiful and more intolerable than it used to be. He longed to show it to Mona. He longed to hear her exclamations of delight at its beauty, and to display so distinguished-looking a creature as his niece and adopted daughter,—for pride was a very ruling passion in the heart of Sandy Craig.

Still, it cost him a severe mental struggle to yield so much to his strong desire for

Mona's company, as to write the letter above quoted. Once done, he was feverishly eager to reap the fruits of his surrender, and reckoned the days till Mona made her appearance.

After a fatiguing journey, for the night was warm, Mona found herself at Glasgow in the grey of the morning. Early as it was, Kenneth, 'in the garb of old Gaul,' awaited her on the platform. He looked so martial and magnificent, that Mona did not recognise him at first. When she did, she was disposed to laugh at what she considered his 'fancy dress.' He assured her, however, that it was his habitual costume when among the hills, and that the only difference he had made was to put on his best go-to-meeting kilt and plaid in her honour.

'Not altogether in *my* honour, Kenneth,' she said, when, having collected her luggage, they had time to exchange a few words.

'Well, maybe not,' he returned, with a happy smile. 'Now, if we leave by the one-twenty train for Kirkcounie, we'll get to Craigdarroch by six o'clock. My uncle

agreed not to expect you before, so you can come away to Mrs Robertson's, where you can rest and have breakfast. She is a *fer*y old friend of Mrs Black, and Mary is just waiting to welcome you. She is wearying to know you, though she will be half frightened at so grand a young lady as you are.'

'Grand! Why, Kenneth, you are chafing me!'

He only laughed, and, calling a cab, they drove away through dull streets, as yet scarcely astir, to the modest mansion of a Free Kirk minister, who was already in his study, and came forth to welcome the stranger lassie with kindly warmth; then his wife appeared, as neat and well-appointed in her cotton morning-dress as if she had made an afternoon toilette; and lastly, Mary, blushing, with downcast eyes and a sweet smile flickering on her lips. The first thing Mona noticed was the golden-red tinge in her soft, abundant hair.

'If mine is half as pretty, I am content,' she thought as she offered her hand, and said kindly,—

'I am very pleased to meet you.'

The words—the tone in which they were said—made Mary look up, and then the smile shone out in her honest, light blue eyes: these, and a red-lipped mouth rarely quite closed over very white teeth, redeemed her face from plainness. Her complexion, though clear and good, was much freckled, and the cheek bones were somewhat high; still Mary Black was undoubtedly a ‘bonnie lassie,’ and pleasant to look at, as Kenneth evidently thought, as his face beamed when his eyes fell upon her.

‘You’ll be awful tired after so many hours in the train; here, Mary, take Miss Craig to the spare room. You’ll maybe like to wash your hands and brush your hair a bit before you eat your breakfast?’

‘Thank you; I feel I need ablution sorely.’

‘I am so very pleased to see you,’ said Mona, when she and Mary had entered the sacred precincts of the spare room.

‘And so am I to meet you; Kenneth told me what a good friend you have been to him; but you are not a bit like what I expected to see.’

‘I suppose not; people never are like what is expected.’

‘I will leave you now; ring when you are ready, and I will show you the way to the breakfast-room.’

At the table were gathered the minister’s younger bairns; a big-boned lad of fourteen; a slight, thoughtful boy of nine or ten—both silently intent on finishing their morning meal, to be off in good time to school—and a chubby girl of six, evidently the pet of the family. The mother told with pride that their eldest boy was away doing weel in Japan, and another daughter had married in the spring, and was living in Liverpool.

The long, devout grace, the bowls of porridge and cups of milk, the voices, the dialect, all seemed to Mona like a chapter out of a Scotch novel; yet it took her fancy. The kindness and frank hospitality had about them a self-respecting restraint—a thoughtful tone—that gave the impression of sincerity. She was struck with the superior softness and sweetness of Kenneth’s and Mary’s voices, and recognised in them types of a very differ-

ent race from that of the minister and his family.

The host appeared to be acquainted with Mr Craig, and spoke of him with a touch of dry humour here and there which showed he was fully alive to the peculiarities of his character. Mr Robertson—a pleasant, well-read man, quite abreast of the modern thought movement—seemed pleased to converse with his young English guest. Both his wife and Mary Black evidently looked upon him as something quite too immensely clever to be addressed save with due consideration, and Kenneth, too, regarded him as a superior being. As soon as he had bestowed the final blessing, the minister bade Mona farewell as he was going out.

Then Mary assisted Mrs Robertson to clear away the breakfast things, and the latter said,—

‘You three young folk will have a good deal to say to one another, so you can have it out here, while I am busy above and below, so soon as I have sent Jamie off to school.’

‘I should think we *had* a good deal to

say to each other,' said Kenneth, as soon as they were alone. 'Mary knows that the only bit of comfort I ever had in yon big dreary town was when I could walk and talk with you, Mona, and that kind soul Madame Debrisay! Isn't it curious, when I used to be with you in London, I thought I saw such a likeness between you and Mary, and now you are together, it has just vanished away?'

'Like Miss Craig?' cried Mary, blushing and laughing. 'Eh, Kenneth, but your eyes must have been all wrong!'

Then a very confidential conversation ensued, and Mona promised to help the lovers in all ways. Indeed, her heart went out very warmly to the gentle, simple Highland lassie, and she privately congratulated Kenneth on his choice.

Having been taken to see the Cathedral and some public buildings, she was given luncheon and hurried away to the station.

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A splendid sunset was glorifying moor and mountain, the loch, and a distant glimpse of blue sea, when the travellers

reached Kirkton, where a very rusty old one-horse phaeton, driven by Uncle Sandy himself, awaited them.

‘Well, my dearie, the sight of you is good for sair een!’ he cried, with unusual warmth, reaching down a hand to assist his niece to the seat beside him; adding in the same breath, ‘and I am right glad you have seen the error of your ways. I am always ready to forgive, when I see ony-one in their right mind.’

‘I am very glad to see you, uncle. What delightful air! It is like new life to breathe it.’

‘Ay, it is just that! You’ll grow strong and weel. Hoo’s a’ wi’ ye, Kenneth? Did you see Mr Macray, and get the papers? Eh, we canna carry the twa big boxes. Can ye do without them till to-morrow, Mona, and I’ll send the cart for them?’

‘Yes, uncle. I have my hand port-manteau, which is quite enough.’

Kenneth scrambled in behind, and after one or two stoppages at shops of the ‘general’ order, they quitted the primitive little town—which is a convenient stopping and starting-place for tourists and sports-

men—and proceeded towards Craigdarroch, by a road which skirted the loch, traversed a pine wood, wound round the head of the water, and then ascended between picturesque rocks crowned with heather and waving bracken, or wound through clumps of fir and oak trees which grew in sheltered hollows, or led round some projecting angle of the hill, from which could be seen a wide stretch of moorland and mountain, all rich and varied with autumnal green, brown, purple, and gold, a dozen different tints melting into each other, while away west over the sea the sun was sinking in a flood of golden light.

The old cart horse that with bent head and patient toil dragged the vehicle up the long ascent, evidently understood his task too well to heed Uncle Sandy's 'gee-ups' and occasional applications of the whip. When they came to a gentle decline or a few level yards, he broke into a slow heavy trot—his great feet beating the road like sledge hammers; then at the very first upward tendency, he deliberately checked his pace to a steady walk, from which nothing could move him. Yet Mona

enjoyed the drive immensely. The beautiful wild scenery ; the soft delicious honey-sweet breeze, that from time to time touched her cheek like a caress ; the restful silence, and perhaps, more than all, the unusually happy expression of Uncle Sandy's puckered face, gave her profound pleasure.

At length, after following a low moss and grass-grown wall for some way, they turned into a narrow road, at the divergence of which a wooden gate, with one broken hinge, lay helplessly open.

'Noo,' said Mr Craig, with all the pride of proprietorship, 'you are in the parks of Craigdarroch.'

'What a delightful country. What a pretty place.'

'Wait till you are up at the hoose. I think you'll say it is better than Westbourne Villas.'

The 'hoose' was turned in a contradictory manner with its face to the hill, and built of melancholy, half-mourning grey stone. Within, a short wide hall lighted from above led to the public rooms, and from it a passage branched off to the sleeping chambers, and a narrow crooked stair

led to various apartments above—for most of the house was only one storey high. The drawing-room had a bay window, from the centre of which steps led down to a pleasure ground, consisting only of grass and groups of trees which grew abundantly in the shelter of the hill—but the view atoned for any deficient ornamentation. From this opened a pleasant room, to which the Glasgow occupier had added a square projecting window—also opening like a door. This had some bookcases and a writing-table, and was dignified by the title of the library. A good dining-room with ordinary windows—for the ground sloped steeply away from that side of the house—and a long narrow apartment containing some glass cases of birds and butterflies, some fossils, a rusty claymore or two, and the skeleton of a deer's head and antlers, which was termed 'the Museum'—these constituted the reception rooms.

At the door stood a respectable grey-haired 'dour' looking woman—the cook and general servant—and behind, the 'bit lassie' who helped her.

'Whaur's the boy?' asked Mr Craig,

descending with the help of his stick and Kenneth's arm.

'He's gane awa to the forge; the grey meer cast a shoe as she was drawing ben the gravel for yon new walk.'

'Ah, and the gardener?'

'Oh, he's awa till his tea.'

'Then, Kenneth, ye must put up Brownie; and give him a good rub down, he's just steaming.'

Mona thought that a woman, a girl, and a boy were a scanty staff for so large a house, and foresaw housekeeping difficulties.

'This is my niece, Miss Craig,' said Uncle Sandy to the 'dour' looking woman; 'ye'll just do a' she tells ye.'

'She'll likely not know our ways, and she frae the south,' she returned sulkily.

'Then you must teach me,' said Mona, smiling so pleasantly on her, that her face relaxed.

'Folk learn quick if they are so minded,' she said, less harshly.

Then Uncle Sandy led Mona through the museum, the dining-room, the drawing-room, the library.

‘You see it’s no a poor hoose,’ he said, with satisfaction. ‘Noo, come awa to your ain bed-chamber. You’ll like it fine, I am thinking.’ Uncle Sandy stumped down the passage and introduced his niece to a pretty airy chamber, the windows of which looked over the garden, with a side glimpse of the loch. ‘My room is next you. I thought if I were sick, or bad with the rheumatics, it would be well to have you nigh hand me. I have had a bell put there, ye see, just over the head of your bed. I can reach the rope frae mine, and wake ye ony time I want ye.’

‘A delightful arrangement,’ said Mona, laughing. ‘It is a charming room, and when I unpack I shall make it look quite pretty. The house has evidently been arranged by men, uncle : it seems awfully bare.’

‘Aweel, women have their uses. If I had been able to marry the lassie I loved, I would be a different mon this day.’

Mona soon found that life at Craigdarroch, in spite of the beauty that surrounded her, was not a bed of roses.

Mr Craig viewed housekeeping expenses through the small end of his mental

telescope, and tried to keep them down to impossible limits ; while at the bottom of his manly heart he feared Phemie the cook far too much to do more than grumble indefinitely.

‘ She is a wastefu’ deil,’ he whispered to his niece, the second day of her sojourn at Craigdarroch, when he was solemnly handing her the keys, and instructing her in the duties of her new position. ‘ You can look after her better than I can. She just drinks pounds o’ tea : twa ounces ought to do her and the girlie for a week ; and then the flesher’s bill is just fearfu’. They twa want good meat meals every day.’

‘ But, uncle, they must have meat every day—no one would serve you without it.’

‘ Weel, it’s just a bad new fashion. Scotchmen grew to be what they are on good oatmeal.’

‘ I shall do my best, uncle, but I am not economical, I warn you. I know what it cost Madame Debrisay and myself to exist, and it will be a sort of guide. May I look at your books.’

‘ Books ! I never keepit ony. I just know the siller slips away ower fast.’

‘No wonder you think so, if you keep no accounts. I will not undertake impossibilities, but if I do not give satisfaction, you must turn me away. Craig of Craigdarroch ought to live like a gentleman.’

‘Eh, but that’s weel said!’ cried Uncle Sandy, with sudden enthusiasm, which showed Mona she had hit the right nail on the head. ‘Weel, do your best, dearie; but you mauna ruin me.’

‘I will try not, uncle.’

So Mona took up her cross with courage and found, as is often the case, that difficulties vanished at the touch of a bold hand.

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A week of this new life passed rapidly. Mona found her hands full; nor was the work unpleasant. Her nature was essentially feminine. She loved order and delicateness in her home, and thought no trouble too much to secure it. Fortunately she succeeded in winning the allegiance of the cook, who, having anticipated that the stinginess of her master would be intensified by the minute inspection of a mistress, was relieved to find a greatly-increased degree

of justice and liberality in the domestic government.

The furniture, too, vexed her soul. It was excellent as regarded quality, but frightful in form and colour. With much persuasion she induced Uncle Sandy to permit of her ordering pretty coloured muslin curtains, a few cheap oriental rugs, and some small etceteras, the choice of which Mona confided to Mary Black. These, with sundry baskets and pots of flowers disposed about the drawing-room, so transformed it that Uncle Sandy scarcely recognised the once stiff and dreary chamber.

‘You’re a clever lassie,’ he cried. ‘You have made the place look grand at no great outlay. Noo, I’m hoping you’ll no ask mair siller for a long time.’

‘We shall want some additions to our furniture and decorations, uncle, before winter,’ returned Mona, who had learned from experience that the less Uncle Sandy was asked for, the less he was inclined to give. ‘But I will tell you about them in good time. Now that you are going to reside here, you must have your house nice. I think you ought to be obliged

to Miss Black for the trouble she has taken.'

'Weel, and who says I am not! She and her people are Kenneth's friends, hey?'

'They are. They were *so* kind and hospitable to me when I arrived, weary and wayworn, in Glasgow, that I should like immensely to ask her to spend a few days here on her way home, if you would permit me. She is a nice girl. I am sure you would like her.'

'Oh! ay, you may ask her as much as you like. Can she sing a Scotch sang?'

'I have no doubt she can. That reminds me, we must have the piano tuned.'

'Tuned! Why it was tuned before I left hame, and has no been played upon since.'

'My dear uncle, the mere lapse of time has reduced it to a sad condition.'

'And, whaur — whaur is the tuner to come from?'

'Cannot Kenneth find out?'

'Aweel, we'll ask a bit at Mr Macintyre's' (the grocer and general dealer). 'We are going into the toun after dinner. I have

to see the gentleman that has taken the moor about the fishing, or one of the gentlemen. There's a pair of them, and one has only just come down.'

'Who are they?' asked Mona carelessly, as she sewed on the band which had come unstitched from her uncle's umbrella.

'Oh! a Colonel Langton, and anither fresh from India, a grand mon, a Sir something Lisle.'

'There's your umbrella, uncle. I think Phemie wants one or two things from Macintyre's: I will give Kenneth a list.'

'Eh, it's just want—want—want—from ae week's end to anither.'

'Of course it is, uncle; are we not always consuming things, and they must be replaced. Then I may write to Miss Black?'

'Ay, she'll tell a' the folk in Glencorrie what a grand place Kenneth is in.'

'Yes, of course she will.'

Mr Craig took his umbrella, and with a muttered complaint that his 'puir back was awfu' bad the day,' hobbled off with the accompanying knock knock of his supports on the floor, to worry the gardener.

Mona took a book and sat down on the step outside the large window, gazing away over mountain, lake, and moorland, which lay steeped in the golden sunshine of a brilliant autumnal noon, a light, slow-sailing cloud now and then casting a shadow upon the varied surface beneath it, a light breeze occasionally rippling the face of the loch and sending up its gentle current to breathe the soft briny freshness it had brought from the sea, against her cheek and through the meshes of her red-gold hair.

She could not read; her uncle's words had sent her thoughts back to that first vivid season of her real life, when she had drunk so deeply of pleasure and of pain.

St John Lisle was within a few miles. She might possibly meet him in her rambles or her drives with her uncle, and how should she feel if they stood face to face? Her heart answered, 'slightly curious, but quite unmoved.' Yes, to her infinite satisfaction, she felt a profound conviction that Lisle could never again stir in her emotion of any kind. She might even be amused with his cool, crisp

talk, if he deigned to bestow any of it on her; she had even forgiven herself her weak credulity, and could smile at her youthful folly in accepting Lisle's veiled attentions and ardent though indefinite expressions of admiration, as meaning anything real. It was all so completely past—though little more than three years had elapsed since they had met and parted—that she felt as if she could meet exactly as though they had never met before. The man she had loved so shyly and warmly had vanished, with the actual St John Lisle she was barely acquainted.

Then the scenes which preceded Mrs Newburgh's death arrayed themselves distinctly before her. How glad she was that her poor grandmother had had the comforting conviction that her beloved Mona would be provided for by a happy marriage; yet to procure that assurance poor Waring had been lapped in elysium for a few short weeks, and then thrown aside when no longer needed.

'I almost wish I could have loved him,' she murmured; 'he was, and no doubt is, a really good fellow. But it was impos-

sible, even if he had had the sort of manner and bearing that were so imposing in Captain Lisle. I could not have loved him *then*. Why is it that attractive outward seeming is so seldom a sign of inward and spiritual grace? There is no use in asking such questions, and I am losing a precious chance of reading.'

She applied herself diligently to her book. In truth she had but little time to herself. When Uncle Sandy was in the house he kept her constantly with him reading aloud or writing the few letters he required to indite, or, worst of all, going over his accounts, for although he 'could na' be fashed wi' hoose accounts,' he kept his affairs rigidly in order, his proudest achievement and deepest delight being to effect large savings out of the sum he permitted himself to spend annually—that was so much clear gain. Then there was the direction of the small household—the providing for its needs. Her greatest relaxation was a ramble alone, or with Kenneth, which latter was a rare indulgence; her truest enjoyment writing and hearing from Madame Debrisay.

The delight of Kenneth when he heard of the success which had attended Mona's sudden inspiration suggesting the invitation to Mary Black, cannot be easily described. His dark eyes were aglow with pleasure from the time he heard of it. His gratitude to his benefactress was unbounded. He was indefatigable in his efforts to oblige everyone. He managed to secure the services of a wandering tuner—he drove a wonderfully successful bargain in the purchase of some sheep—and otherwise distinguished himself. At length the happy day arrived when he was to go into Kirkcoun to meet the expected visitor, who was to reach that station at half-past one. Mona had made all due preparation for her guest, and sat down to read the *Times* to Uncle Sandy in the drawing-room. They had not long been thus employed when the sound of wheels upon the gravel attracted their attention.

‘It canna be Kenneth, yet,’ said Uncle Sandy, glancing at the clock.

‘No, he has hardly reached Kirkcoun yet,’ returned Mona.

‘There is a gentleman wants to speak wi’ you,’ said the little help, coming into the room in the neat cap Mona insisted on her wearing.

‘Aweel, put him in the museum,’ replied her master.

‘Eh, but he’s just behind me!’ cried the girl, stepping back, whereupon a gentleman in shooting dress walked in, his cap in his hand, a distinguished-looking man, with an embrowned face, rather light eyes, and thick moustache.

‘You will, I hope, excuse—’ he was beginning in the clear, haughty voice Mona remembered so well, when his eyes met hers, and he stopped, growing suddenly silent with surprise.

Mona laid aside her paper, and rising, advanced quietly, saying, as she did so,—

‘How do you do, Captain Lisle?’

‘Miss Joscelyn! This is quite an unexpected pleasure!’ he exclaimed, taking the hand she offered, and evidently more moved than she was.

‘Hoo’s this? Do you know Sir St John Lisle?’ cried Mr Craig.

‘I used to know Captain Lisle,’ re-

turned Mona, smiling, and looking steadily at him.

‘I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Joscelyn in London some years ago.’

‘There’s no Miss Joscelyn here,’ interrupted Uncle Sandy impatiently. ‘This is my niece—my puir brother’s daughter—Miss Craig.’

‘Oh, indeed! forgive the mistake.’

He paused, and for a few short seconds seemed less self-possessed than Mona could have imagined possible.

‘I suppose,’ he resumed, in his natural tone and manner, ‘you are spending the autumn in this beautiful spot. Really, Mr Craig, you have a superb view—the finest I have yet seen since I came up here,’ and he advanced to the window, his eyes glancing quickly from the view he praised to Mona’s face, which he scanned with a curious, questioning glance.

‘It’s weel enough,’ said Uncle Sandy, swelling with pride in his possessions, ‘and I’m glad you are pleased with it; and noo, what’s yer wull?’

‘Oh—ah—I brought you a letter from Mr Macfarlane’s agent. You will see what

he says about your rights of fishing, and how far they extend. It seems M'Gregor has let his fishing to Lord Finistoun, and I am now on my way to Strathairlie to see what we can do in the way of mutual accommodation. Have you seen Lady Finistoun yet? You used to be great chums, I remember,' addressing Mona.

'I did not know she had arrived.'

'They came last Saturday,' said Lisle, handing the letter he had spoken of to Mr Craig, who put on his glasses and proceeded to read it with great deliberation.

'Does *she* know you are in this part of the world?' continued Lisle, letting his eyes rest on Mona with the peculiar lingering gaze that used to disturb her—even now it cost her an effort to meet them with a smiling, unembarrassed look, but she succeeded, as she answered,—

'No; I rarely hold any communication with her; when we meet, she is as nice and sweet as ever.'

'Perennial charm and sweetness seem to be the peculiarity of your race!' he returned, with a caressing smile.

Mona slightly raised her eyebrows, and observed,—

‘Bertie is not exactly fascinating.’

‘Bertie, no, of course—’

‘I’m thinking there is a contradiction somewhere,’ interrupted Mr Craig, looking up from the letter he had been reading. ‘I will just look for the letter I had frae Balmuir himself. I have it somewhere,’ and taking his stick he walked away into his library.

‘What an extraordinary, delightful surprise to find you here!’ exclaimed Lisle, rising and coming over to the window where Mona sat, and leaning his shoulder against the frame. ‘I never was more amazed than when my eyes fell upon you. Is this old—gentleman really your uncle?’

‘Really and truly my father’s elder brother. You see, I have reverted to my natural grade.’

‘I feel all at sea,’ said Lisle slowly, his eyes still dwelling on her. ‘Do you know, I watched the papers for the announcement of your marriage for months, then I wrote to Bertie Everard, and heard from him that you had thrown over the poor

devil I had been envying, and disappeared in the deepest disgrace with everyone.'

'How very good of you to take so much interest in a person you were not likely to see again!' said Mona, looking up in his face with a half smile.

'I *always* hoped to see you again.'

'Really?' archly.

'You knew I did!' returned Lisle quickly.

'I knew nothing about you, except that you were an amusing partner, and waltzed remarkably well—almost as well as you thought you did.'

Lisle did not answer immediately; he pulled his moustaches, and looked thoughtfully out of the window.

'And did you discover your uncle soon after you left the Chase?'

'Not for a considerable time.'

'And how did you manage?—I am dying to hear your history. You will tell me everything, won't you? We were always sworn allies.'

'Oh! I have no story to tell. I have been extremely fortunate, and I have no claim on anyone's compassion.'

A scornful smile curved her haughty mouth.

‘No. I suspect you would very quickly throw it back in the face of any idiot who presumed to offer it! But I shall see you again; I hear your interesting relative approaching. I must see you again.’

‘There is no reason why you should not,’ returned Mona, with much composure.

As she spoke, Mr Craig came in, the letter he had gone to seek for in his hand.

‘I am right,’ he said exultingly, as he tumbled into a chair rather than sat down. ‘Balmuir himself writes to me on the 25th of June 1883 that he believes my rights extend as far as the cairn of Kilnethan; and here’—striking the letter Lisle had brought with irritation—‘his factor says I canna feesh below the grey stane dyke at the lower pool. Just read for yourself.’

Lisle took both letters, and read them with an air of profound interest.

‘There is a distinct contradiction,’ he said when he had finished. ‘Suppose I take both up to Balmuir, and talk the

matter over with him, and let you know the result. I do not wish to give you more trouble than I can help,' he added courteously.

'You're varra polite. It would save me a good bit o' trouble. I'm a puir frail body, as you see, and noo, we'll be having dinner in a quarter of an hour, stay and tak' a bite. The boy shall put up your horse. You'll be late for lunch at the Lodge.'

'Thank you,' said Lisle, frankly and graciously. 'I shall be most happy,' his eyes seeking Mona's with a laughing glance.

'Just rin oot, dearie,' said her uncle, 'and tell Jamie to put the horse in the stable. The gig can bide in the yard.'

'Pray, Miss—Miss Craig, allow me. I could not think of allowing *you* to be sent to—'

'You had better let me go. Probably Jamie would not attend to your orders,' interrupted Mona.

She went away to deliver the message, and Lisle followed her.

'Is Donald at the stables,' she added. 'Make him attend to the horse. I am

afraid of trusting your smart turn-out in Jamie's rude hands,' she said to Lisle.

'He cannot do much harm. What a trump your uncle is to ask me to stay.'

'And how very much bored you will be before the mid-day meal is over.'

'I am ready to risk that.'

Mona turned to re-enter the drawing-room.

'Are there not gardens or ferneries or something to look at?' asked Lisle insinuatingly.

'Yes, we have very good gardens. Would you like to see them?'

'Certainly; above all things.'

'Very well. Uncle Sandy,' she said, opening the door, 'Captain—I mean Sir St John Lisle would like to see the gardens.'

'Varra weel. I'll be prood to show them;' and Uncle Sandy leant over the arm of his chair to pick up his stick, which as usual had fallen on the carpet.

'I will stay to receive Miss Black, who must soon be here,' said Mona gently, as she took up her work and resumed her seat by the window.

Lisle cast a backward glance at her as he left the room—a glance she did not pretend to see. As soon as she was alone her hands dropped into her lap—a grave, almost sad expression crept over her speaking face, which had worn so bright and amused an aspect, while she remembered the sharp pain, the corroding mortification that had eaten into her soul, and for which she had to thank the pleasant-mannered, distinguished-looking man who had just left her.

“All’s well that ends well,” she murmured, rousing herself. ‘It is all past now, and left not even a scar. I did not think his presence would have moved me so little. I will never avoid him, or seem unfriendly, but I defy him to flirt with me if I do not choose. I hope he is enjoying his ramble with Uncle Sandy.’

Here the sound of wheels upon the gravel drew her to the entrance in time to see the phaeton drive up, wherein sat Kenneth triumphant, and Mary Black beside him.

Mona welcomed her cordially. It was refreshing to meet the honest eyes, to hear

the frank unsophisticated voice of the simple, natural Highland lassie.

‘I am so glad to see you. Uncle Sandy has gone out round the garden with a gentleman, so I will show you your room at once. She is looking blooming, Kenneth,—better than when we met in Glasgow.’

‘I am so glad to see you a bit alone before I meet Mr Craig,’ said Mary, as she followed Mona down the long passage to her room; ‘I am very frightened of him.’

‘But you must not be so,’ said her young hostess. ‘My uncle likes those least who fear him most.’

‘It was so good of you to ask me. Kenneth told me all about it, and mother bid me present her best compliments to you.’

Then they had a little cheerful talk about the most becoming mode of dressing the hair, with a few words on the prevailing fashion of morning frocks; after which it was time to go to the drawing-room, which they hardly reached before the bell rang.

Mona could hardly repress a smile when Uncle Sandy appeared, followed by his guest. Lisle looked rather grave, but Mr Craig had an air of self-satisfaction, which

spoke volumes as to the amount of boring his victim had endured.

‘And this is Miss Black? I am weel pleased to welcome her to Craigdarroch. Any friend of Miss Craig’s, my niece, is welcome to me, especially a bonnie lassie like you. Sit ye doon, sit ye doon.’ And he proceeded to ask a blessing of portentous length.

The mid-day meal proceeded very successfully. To Mona’s surprise, Lisle made himself very pleasant, listening to all Uncle Sandy said with interest, and just enough difference of opinion to stimulate the old man to triumphant argument. He seemed to enjoy the very simple food set before him, and discussed fishing with Kenneth, inviting him to spend a day on the river’s side, occasionally sending a half-admiring, half-defiant glance to Mona, which seemed to say that he was not to be easily shaken off. Seeing that it made Mary blush painfully to be noticed, he kindly left her alone. Directly to Mona he said very little, but he inquired if she had seen this or that periodical or quarterly, and offered to send them up to her. Finally, he was, he said,

reluctantly obliged to take leave, and the whole party went out to see him start.

‘I suppose I may give your love to Lady Finistoun, Miss Craig. She will be here to-morrow, I daresay, when she knows who is in her neighbourhood. Many thanks for your hospitality, Mr Craig. I will come up again as soon as I have seen M’Gregor. Adieu.’

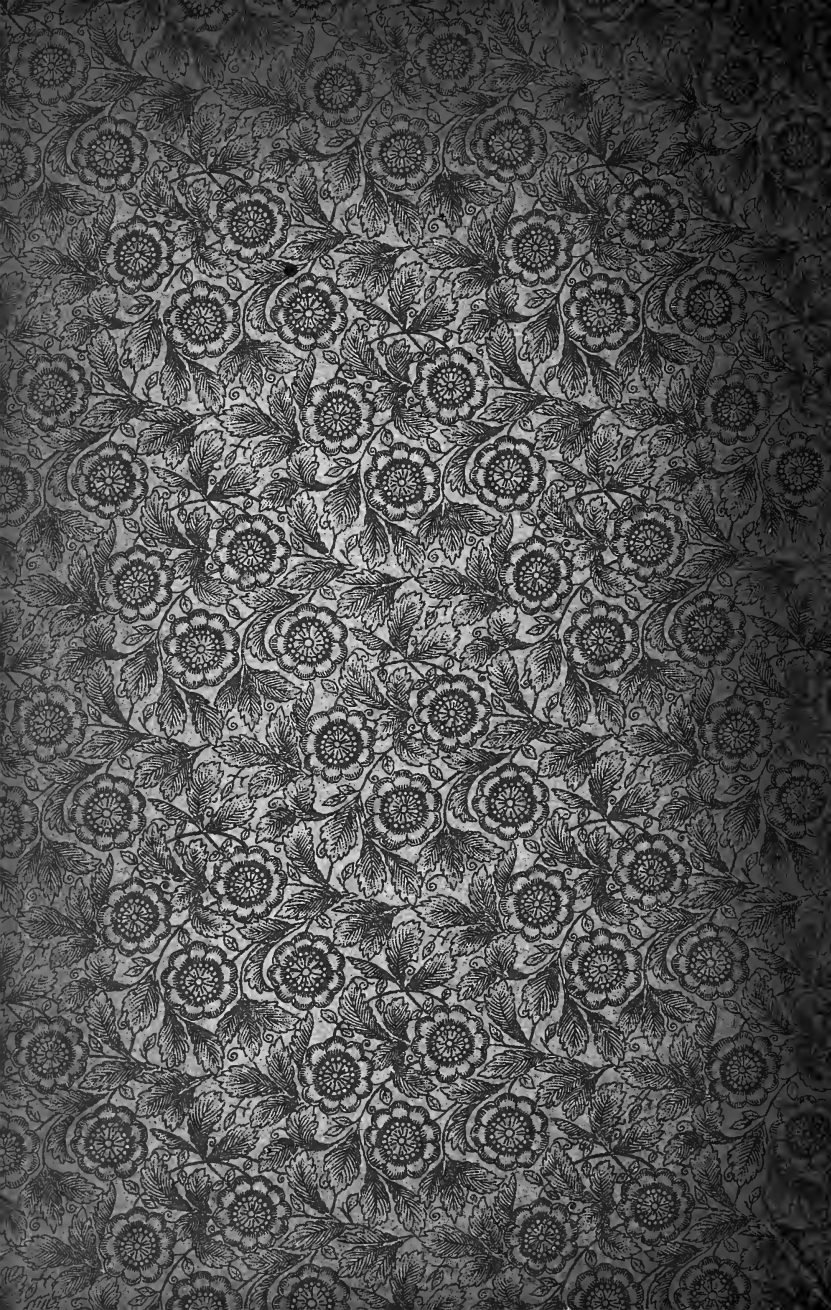
A wave of the hand, an uplifting of his hat, he touched his spirited horse with the whip, and in another moment he was out of sight round the curve of the drive.

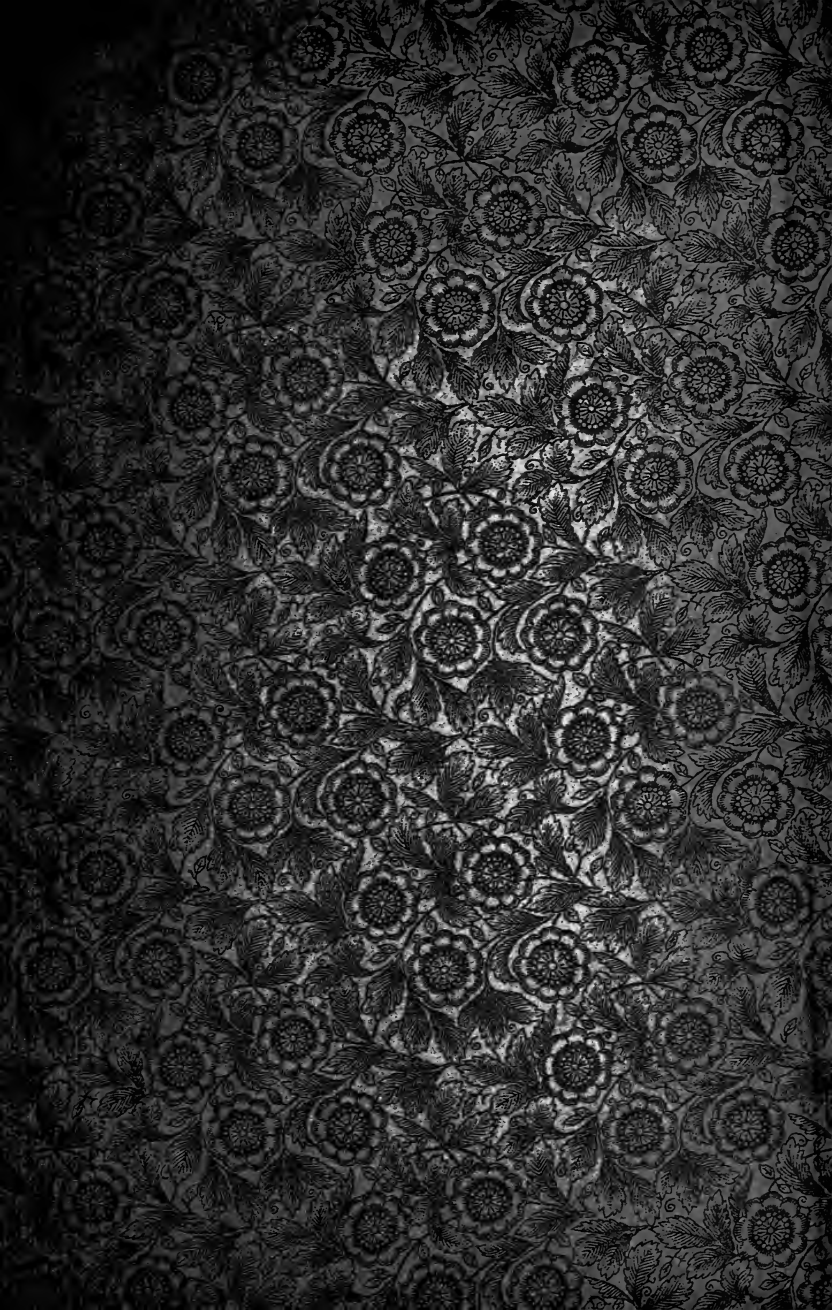
‘What style there was about him,’ Mona could not help saying to herself. ‘What cool self-possession, and certainty of his own position. Strength is always attractive in a man. I almost wish I had never found him out,’ she thought.

‘A varra reasonable, wise-like young mon, for ane in his position, and willing to hear truth from the lips of a thoughtful body. But he has his tempers, I’ll be bound. He was just anither sort o’ man the day I went to meet him—short-spoken and scornful-like. But I daursay he sune saw that Sandy Craig could hold his ain with

a'body. Aha, lad, he's changed his tune the day! Come along, my bonnie bairn! Kenneth and me are going to our books, so Mona will take you round the gardens and the grounds, forbye the dairy.'

END OF VOL. II.





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